

THE MAN THAT NEVER GREW UP

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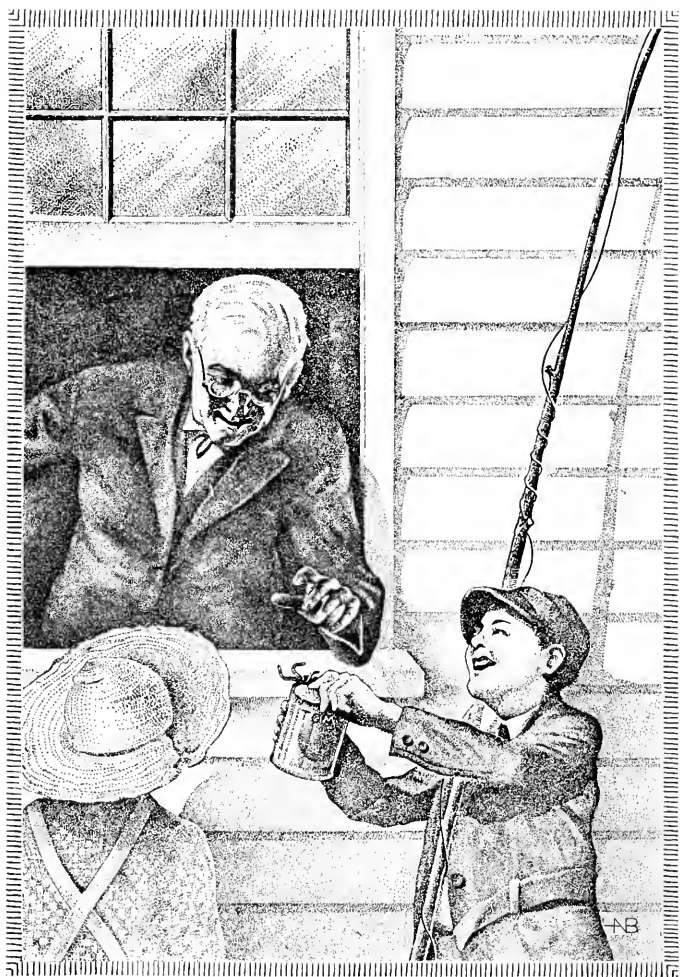


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THE MAN
THAT NEVER GREW UP







Next to the Judge, "Snootey" was probably the best posted person in town in regard to fish and how to catch 'em.

THE MAN
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GREW UP

A Novel

BY

MABEL C. AND WILLIAM A. LATHROP

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TO OUR SON

ADDISON SARGENT LATHROP

THIS BOOK IS AFFECTIONATELY DEDICATED
BY MOTHER AND DADDY

THE MAN THAT NEVER GREW UP

CHAPTER I

THE Judge pushed back his chair from the table with the air of a man who had finished his breakfast—or rather a man who didn't want any breakfast at all. He was engaged in folding his napkin carefully, when the door to the kitchen opened and Easter Sunday stood looking down upon him, her mighty hands resting upon her still mightier hips, as she regarded him with positive disapproval. Easter Sunday Jackson was very large and very colored, and owed her excessively Christian name to the fact that she had first seen the light of this world upon that day of all days in the Church calendar, some fifty-odd years before.

The Judge started guiltily at the mere sight of Easter, and quickly hitched his chair a trifle nearer to the table and hastily swallowed another mouthful of coffee from the almost untouched cup. While this was manifestly an act of propitiation, it was also an out-and-out confession of remissness, and Easter was not to be deceived thereby. She waddled in and

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looked askance at the bacon and eggs still remaining upon the Judge's plate and the saucer of glistening raspberries submerged in cream beside it. Neither had been touched. The hot corn-muffins were still wrapped in the napkin exactly as she had put them near his plate after he had taken his seat at the table. The Judge felt it wise to take another hasty sip of coffee and a spoonful of berries; but Easter sniffed disgustedly.

"Looka yah, Jaidge—yo' ain't e't nuthin'!" she said, in a decided, but grieved and reproachful way.

"Oh, indeed I have, Easter!" protested the Judge, but in a half-hearted manner. "I've had a nice breakfast—a *very, very* nice breakfast!"

Easter surveyed the table and took account of stock, moving his plate a little closer to him, and unwrapping the muffins.

"What has yo' e't?" demanded she, in severe cross-examination.

"Why—I—er—coffee and berries—really, I had all I wanted. You see, Easter," said the Judge, lamely, "I didn't really want much—and I'm in a hurry to get to the office. I've actually had more than sufficient."

Easter calmly unfolded his napkin and spread it across his knees before replying: "No, Sah! Ain't no s'ficiency 'bout it," said she—"yo' ain't e't nuthin'."

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Gently but firmly she pushed his chair back to the table, and placed the knife and fork before him; then buttered one of the muffins, and after putting a big 'spot' of honey on it she handed it to him: "Dar, now," she said, with a finality that left no room for argument, "cl'ar dat off!"

The Judge meekly "cl'ared it off," and set out to consume the rest of the breakfast. It must be admitted that once he started, he ate with a relish. Easter watched him with solicitude, not unmixed, however, with a very definite element of discipline that permitted no slacker methods.

"Yo' eats jes' like my Jim de day he foun' a green-back dollah—couldn' eat on 'count o' studyin' how he gwine t' squanner hit! Yo' all time studyin' 'bout reshin' down to de offuss! 'Tain't no call to herry—offuss gwine be right dar—nobuddy gwine run off wid hit!"

When the Judge had consumed an amount that was apparently satisfactory to Easter, he again pushed back his chair and looked at her with the air of one seeking commendation for a deed well performed; and as Easter made no further objection, he went out into the hall and put on his hat.

"Has yo' got a clean han'kersheff?" called Easter, and the Judge hurriedly searched himself only to fish out a very much soiled one from a coat-tail pocket. Easter examined it carefully and promptly

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rejected it as unfit for use in its present condition. Having loaned it to a man to clean his hands of axle-grease, the Judge felt that the less he said the better, as Easter labored up the stairs and returned with two fresh ones. Then she turned him around and looked him over critically, brushing him off, here and there, and removing a stray raveling from his coat. The Judge being at last officially presentable, he was allowed to go, and he proceeded down the walk to the front gate with a quick, energetic step. There was about him a suggestion of relief at being able to escape—a relief very much akin to that which a schoolboy feels when he manages to get away without being told to come back and wash his neck.

It would have been hard, indeed, to tell the Judge's age; in fact years had little to do with it. He might have been anywhere between forty-five and sixty, but in his case it would have been a mistake to reckon by years—there were vastly better ways of estimating. It is the things that are crowded into one's years that count. He seemed to have lived, not so many years, but long enough to do an incalculable amount of kind and helpful things, to speak unnumbered words of comfort and encouragement to those who needed them, and to radiate an unbelievable amount of happiness.

Judge Peabody was of about medium height, and perhaps a trifle spare, but the spareness was in no

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way suggestive of physical weakness. A closer look revealed the fact that there was a wiry sturdiness about him that bespoke endurance. His hair was silvered—a great shock of it tumbled about his fine head in picturesque confusion that did not altogether conform to the town barber's ideas of how "a gent's hair oughta be wore." When it needed cutting—always to be determined by Easter—she cut it.

Possibly the somewhat painful tediousness of this ordeal accounted for the fact that the Judge was inclined to wear his hair a trifle long. His skin was as clear and fresh as that of a boy, and in his eyes there dwelt a perpetual twinkle. The corners of his mouth turned up, naturally and permanently, though he had a habit of forcing them down momentarily, as though trying unsuccessfully to repress a smile. The "crow's feet" about his eyes and the lines of his face were the indubitable autographs of Good Nature, genuine and certified. And there was also a certain buoyant resiliency about his carriage and manner—an eagerness that was indicative of boundless optimism. No sunflower ever turned its face to its god with more persistent fidelity than did the Judge turn his face toward the light. No situation appeared so grave that it might not have been worse; no cloud was so black that he could not see the silver lining. It had to be a mighty tough state of affairs

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if the Judge could not get some comfort out of any old situation that might arise.

Once upon a time he had started one of his boy friends in the sheep-raising business—that is, he had given him an old ewe. One morning the boy burst into his office with the glad news: “Oh, Judge, what do you think? My old ewe’s had three nice little lambs!”

“Well, well, well!” beamed the Judge, laying aside some important papers, “Just think of that! Now, you can shear them next spring, and just look at the money you’ll get!” And they sat down together to figure out how much that would be at the present price of wool—“and maybe wool will go higher up—it looks like it,” prophesied the Judge.

That afternoon, the boy came back and reported that one of the lambs was dead.

“Never mind,” comforted the Judge, “three lambs are too many for the old ewe to drag around all summer! You won’t lose anything, maybe, for the two lambs will get more care than three would, and they’ll be bigger and have better wool.”

A few days later the boy was in again with the sad tidings that another lamb had passed in the Beyond. “I wouldn’t feel bad over it,” soothed the Judge; “that one lamb will be a buster! He’ll get all the care, and you’ll find he’ll be worth more than

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the other two would have been. He'll be a regular rip-snorter—you see if he isn't!"

But still the death-rate did not abate, and the tearful youngster sobbed out the sad news that the remaining lamb had joined his brothers in the place where good lambs go. This time the Judge took the boy on his knee: "It's just as well," said he, thinking hard. "Now the poor, old ewe can spend the summer in peace, and not be bothered by looking after lambs. She was a good ewe, in her day, and was entitled to comfort in her old age. The wool-market looks bad, anyhow—probably be a slump."

"Yes," sobbed the boy, "but—the old—ewe—died—too!"

The Judge swallowed hard, for this was a stagerer.

"She did, hey?" he queried. "Well, I'm not surprised and perhaps it's just as well. She was getting pretty old. You see, while she was a good enough ewe, as ewes go, she wasn't a *fancy* sheep—not the new kind that they are breeding now—that grow about twice as much wool, and better! I've got my eye on one of 'em for you, and you shall have it—unless—maybe—there's some other kind of business you'd rather go into? Chickens or pigeons, mebbe—or rabbits? You just pick out the kind of thing you want to raise and we'll go cahoots—what do you say?"

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The Judge's house was one of the oldest structures in town. It was a rambling affair and set well back in the yard and a broad piazza ran almost entirely around three sides of it. Back of it stood the barn, long disused except by the boys as a meeting place. The house had probably been painted white, at one time, and the blinds green; but each had taken on that neutral shade unattainable by any other means than that which Time and Weather combine to produce. It had "been in the family" for several generations, and although many Peabodys had been born and had grown to manhood and womanhood there, the stock had "sort of petered out," as folks said, and for many years the Judge had been its sole occupant, with none to "molest his ancient, solitary reign," excepting Easter Sunday.

Some thirty years back his father had died, and his mother had followed on quickly, and for a time the Judge had kept house, himself. But when Easter Sunday Jackson and her baby had been left destitute by the sudden demise of Mr. Jackson, who, on a dark night, had slightly over-estimated his ability to negotiate an unusually heavy consignment of gin across the railroad track, the Judge took them into his home—there being no other place for them to go, so far as anybody else knew or cared—and he never had cause to regret his Samaritanism. Easter took hold from the start and repaid the Judge's kindness

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with a faithfulness and devotion that were monumental. By degrees, from a more or less menial capacity, she came to assume a personal and parental supervision over the Judge, treating him exactly as a mother would a child that needed looking after—and the Judge was really little else than just that. However laughable and seemingly humiliating this relationship was at times, it was, after all, a most comfortable and salutary one; for, as the Judge never, under any circumstances, gave himself a thought, it was perhaps just as well to have somebody around who did.

No more did he appear in public without his necktie; no more was there a saw-edge on his collar or cuffs, or a lamberkin on his trousers. Nor on rainy or snowy days did he get off without his rubbers and his umbrella; or without a handkerchief, on any kind of a day. As far as his table was concerned, it was the talk of the town how Easter “kep’ him fed up.” Her reputation for culinary talent was proverbial, even among those who believed that a woman’s mission, after the honeymoon, lies entirely within the confines of the kitchen, and who failed not to remind “their women” of this view with great frequency and emphasis. Indeed few people declined an invitation to dine at the Judge Peabody’s home.

Easter’s baby had, in the course of time, arrived

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at the age of ten, in spite of any handicap that his name may have placed in the way. It had survived the name of Epaphroditus Bogardus General Grant Jackson! "Epaphroditus," because it was "classy" (or classic); "Bogardus," because of a former "gem'-mun fren',"—fickle but not forgotten; and "General Grant" on account of the widespread popularity of that valiant man. The boy, however, answered to the name of "Jim," and was quite an important member of the Judge's household. The Judge made little or no distinction between Jim and the other boys in the matter of his social intercourse with them; nor did the boys. Jim did pretty much the same as the rest, and was accorded about the same privileges and status. Social lines are indistinct and uncertain at ten in Spring Valley.

This place was, perhaps, one of the smallest of country towns that had not been entirely ignored by Rand & McNally, although it is quite possible that some residents would have resented it being called a "country town." True, the elms arched over the main street, and only one side of "The Square" was given over to commerce. It was still possible to bring a basket of eggs, or a load of garden-sass, down to Bradley's store, and swap them for as near an equivalent in calico or other goods as Bradley could be induced to give. The "hitching-post" and the "horse-block" were yet very much in evidence, al-

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though Henry Ford had begun to exert an influence to put them out of business. Indeed, a majority of the population had ceased to regard an automobile with implacable hostility, and were now able to see one pass through the village with something like equanimity, although many of them deemed it best to "step lively" when it was still a hundred yards away, and were plainly relieved when it had passed.

Twice a day, a dingy, puffy, rattly, smoky locomotive, with a tender and a combination baggage and passenger-coach of a former generation, stopped at the "depot," apparently for the purpose of complying with a schedule, rather than for the accommodation of passengers, or for business reasons of any kind—unless it was the handling of the mail. It was on account of the stopping of the engine and coach that Spring Valley had not been entirely ignored by Rand & McNally.

But, of late, many things were afoot. Already the foundations had been laid for a canning factory and a creamery in the "suburbs," and there was considerable excitement over the proposed trolley-line that would connect Spring Valley with the county-seat. What good it would do Spring Valley to be connected with the county-seat, or what advantage could possibly result to the county-seat in being connected with Spring Valley were not exactly clear—except, possibly, in the minds of the promo-

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ters. Most of the people in the town were against it, being "sot" in their ways. But after Jim Ramsay had made one or two visits to town and had talked to Joe Belcher, who was president of the bank, and to Sid Pomeroy, who had a mortgage on about everything that was mortgagable in town, these two gentlemen saw the light. Jim Ramsay had ways of making people see it—most of them being willing to see anything that he wanted them to see.

Jim Ramsay was a sort of local Warwick—a county king-maker. He occupied no political office himself, but if any one else aspired to do so, it was just as well to see Jim before announcing candidacy. He was large and genial, and had a way of agreeing with anything any one said. He was a splendid listener, but spoke ever so little, and that little in whispers; but he performed eloquently with a cigar—an intimate could almost tell what was passing in Jim's mind by the way he handled it. It went from one side of his mouth to the other by dexterous lingual manipulation, now tilted at various angles, then drooping, almost pendulous. At times, as he listened, he would take it out of his mouth and examine it intently, rolling it in his fingers, and flicking the ashes off in a most professional way. Then he would put it back between his teeth, and securing a firm, and then a yet firmer hold upon it, would shove his hands deep into his trou-

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sers' pockets, lay back his head and gaze at the ceiling. This attitude was supposed to indicate weighty deliberation, and people waited breathlessly for the gems of thought that seemed about to fall from his lips. However, nothing more pregnant usually fell than, "Umm—I'll have to think it over."

He was a shrewd questioner—always gathering information, seldom giving any away. The Judge always said that whenever Ramsay did venture to give out information, it was safe to "copper it." He was ubiquitous, and no one was surprised to see him turn up at any time in any part of the county, but he usually haunted the state capital. Everything he did, apparently, was shrouded in mystery of one kind or another, and his methods partook of the character of the gum-shoe and the submarine. There existed not the slightest doubt in anybody's mind that "Jim Ramsay's crooked enough to hide behind a corkscrew—but too slick to let anybody get anything on him!" He was reputed to be wealthy—"Never done nuthin'—an' got rich at it!" As is frequently the case, his fortune was estimated at widely divergent figures by those who knew nothing about it at all. It was alleged that he was "connected with certain interests"—which vague assertion always seemed to be a way of hinting darkly at a man without really saying anything—having

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such a sinister and plutocratic sound, redolent of trusts and combinations in restraint of trade and "malefactors of great wealth," who are trying to "put something over" on the proletariat.

Ramsay's appearance in Spring Valley at this time caused no unusual excitement, as it was generally understood that he was interested in putting through the proposed trolley-line; and this impression was confirmed when the "sitters" at Bradley's store saw him enter the bank, whither Sid Pomeroy had hurried but a few minutes before.

The Judge proceeded leisurely to his office—it was astonishing how long it took the Judge to get there, though it was but a few hundred yards from his home. There were always many distracting things on the way—neighbors who stopped him for a word or two of advice about all sorts of matters, and there were many boys who had something to confide or something that needed adjustment, and the Judge had never been known to turn a deaf ear to any one.

The Judge, as a matter of fact, was not a judge at all; he had never held any public position except, that of a practicing lawyer; but the title had been conferred on him by his fellow-townsmen in a more or less humorous way. Every country town has its "Judge," that appellation being regarded as a sort of recognition due to any lawyer of advancing years.

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It is by exactly the same process that, in Dixie, almost everybody of importance eventually gets to be "Colonel." All he has to do is to be reasonably respectable and live long enough, and his promotion is assured.

The Judge's office occupied the first and only floor of a small building just off "The Square," and had obviously been designed for residential purposes. The "parlor," which opened directly off the street, did duty as an ante-room; while the living-room served as a private office. The door of the outer office always stood hospitably open, except in bad weather, and people walked in and out as they pleased, and little privacy was observed about the "private office." Unless Alan Bailey were there—Alan, who studied law in the Judge's office and also clerked at Bradley's store—they walked right into the inner room with no formality of announcement. If Alan were there, however, he imparted a semi-metropolitan dignity to calls of clients, and detained them in the outer room, and the caller got that most baffling of answers, "The Judge is in conference now and cannot be disturbed. If you care to wait——!" That word "conference" took all the insistence out of the most importunate caller, and suggested most important and weighty matters. True, the conference may be in regard to a million-dollar contract, or the kind of fly trout take best in early June;

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or, possibly, as to the relative merits of a cocktail or a whiskey toddy as a pre-prandial tickler—but it's a "conference," and that settles it. If Alan had said, "The Judge is busy," the caller would probably have said, "Oh, that's all right—I'll go right in." But Alan was a graduate of Cornell and his education had not been in vain. Besides, Spring Valley was looking up.

Alan Bailey had been born and raised in Spring Valley; and when Aunt Hetty Patton died and left him nearly two thousand dollars, he had, upon the Judge's advice, straightway entered college, and made the best possible use of his time. As a boy, he had always looked up to, and loved, the Judge; and when it came time to determine "what to do," he had consulted and followed his advice.

The question of entering a city office, or of remaining in Spring Valley and studying with the Judge, had been debated at length; and Alan had finally decided that the latter plan was the better. The Judge held a brief for this course, and was able to mention a long list of "country lawyers," who had made distinguished metropolitan counsel sit up and take notice. Besides, the two thousand was almost gone, and clerking in Bradley's, while it wasn't any bed of roses and did not carry with it enough salary to cause Alan to sit up nights figuring out his income-tax, it did provide a living. And

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it was a sure thing that, if the Judge was fond of any one, he would manage to throw a good deal of business in his way.

The Judge's practice could easily have been made highly profitable, but he simply wouldn't allow it to become so. A very large part of it was done for friends, and the Judge just wouldn't take anything like an adequate fee from a friend. And as he wouldn't take a case at all from a person he disliked, or of whom he disapproved, it can be readily understood that there might be considerable "pickings" for one who was associated with him. There are worse places for a young lawyer to win his spurs than in a small country town.

On his arrival at the office, the Judge found Bailey at the desk in the outer room with an open law-book before him.

"Hello, Alan!" greeted the Judge cheerily. "You are certainly an early bird and deserve a worm—though if I were you, I'd use the worm for bait—the boys tell me the trout are fairly aching to be caught these days! I find you working here at the office when I get here mornings, and folks tell me that they can't keep awake long enough to see what time you put out the light here nights. Don't overdo it. Why don't you take a day off and go fishing?" and the Judge looked wistfully out of the open door.

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Alan smiled: "I'm afraid I can't, Judge," he said. "I can't put in all the time here I'd like to, as it is. Bradley keeps his eye on the clock to see that he gets all the time I'm paid for; and as for taking a day off——" Alan's gesture indicated that such a thing was too absurd to be even thought of.

The Judge sniffed: "Humph! I suppose that working for Bradley isn't exactly one grand, sweet song! We'll see if it can't be arranged some way. I hear Jim Ramsay is in town—did you lock the safe?"

"No," said Alan, smiling, "I forgot it—and besides, a safe wouldn't keep him from getting anything he wanted, anyway!"

"Well," said the Judge, laughing, "I guess that's so; and mebbe, it is just as well not to lock it anyway. What's more, I haven't any idea where the key is! Anybody who burgles that safe will get into debt!" And the Judge, chuckling at the care-freedom of the poor, went on into the private office.

CHAPTER II

It is probable, that in all the world, there is not, and never was, a private office anything like the Judge's. It was a large room with two windows on each side, and had evidently been used originally as a dining and living-room. Between the windows, on one side of the room, was a marble mantel, and the usual brass andirons stood before the open fireplace. The mantel was piled high with a mixture of articles that suggested that it served as a sort of catch-all—a receptacle for things that were a trifle too good for the waste-basket, and not good enough to preserve carefully—the sort of things “that may come in handy, some time.” Among other things were several books and pamphlets, packages of legal documents tied with red tape, a much discolored and evidently abandoned straw hat, one or two old leaders and flies, a leather wallet that was beyond repair, several half-filled bottles of ink and liniment or lotion, a very dusty pitcher and glass, a pair of well-worn shoes, several group photographs of outings or picnic parties in which the Judge had participated, a gallon can that apparently held kerosene, and a small plank to which was attached a

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stuffed fish—evidently a trophy—certainly not an ornament.

A long plain table occupied the center of the room, and it was covered with papers and documents of various kinds, in the utmost confusion. The large safe, of the vintage of forty years back, stood against the wall opposite the door, and the name "safe" was significant. No burglar, or even a sneak-thief, with a particle of self-respect or business acumen, would have looked at it a second time, much less would he have investigated its contents. There were several plain chairs distributed about the room, and a settee, one of the arms of which was missing. It is impossible to practice law "up state" without a settee. On the floor were several rag rugs, made by old and industrious ladies of the village, who felt that they ought to occupy their time making *something*. The Judge had bought them at church fairs—not that he wanted the rugs, but somebody had to buy them to encourage the old ladies.

Between the windows, on the other side of the room, was a book-case with the most motley collection of books that a law office ever had within its confines. There were, of course, a few law-books in sedate sheepskin; but the rest ranged from Shakespeare to Nick Carter—down or up, according to the point of view of the reader. It must be confessed that the Judge leaned a little toward—well, Shake-

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speare is all right too! And then there was a treatise on "Botts in Cattle," and books that told exactly what to do when a horse had the glanders or the heaves or the string-halt. There was a fine edition of "Geodetic Survey of Manitoba," and a "Report of the Proceedings of The Forty-seventh Congress of The United States." These were supplemented by a number of the works of the late A. G. Spaulding, there being in evidence such titles as "How To Learn To Box," "How To Learn To Swim," and copies of the "Official Baseball Guide" for many successive years.

It must not be supposed that the Judge had acquired these latter books entirely for his own use; his clientele embraced every boy in the village, and the courtesies of the Judge's library were always extended to his clients.

Any mention of this library must include a reference to his books on fishing. If there has been anything on the subject of game-fish published since the time of Izaak Walton that wasn't in that book-case, it was because the Judge didn't know about it—and that is improbable. And this obsession was evidenced also on the walls, where there were not only color-plates of gaudy-looking trout and bass and perch and other fish that one is liable to meet any time, but there were scenes of woods and streams where dapper and sportily-clad men and young

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women stood daintily on a rock in the midst of a boiling torrent, or waded right out into it, regardless of their clothes. They were always just on the point of landing a fish; the rod—always an extremely slender one—being bent almost double. Fish always seem to bite like that—in pictures!

In addition to the fish-pictures, there were portraits of Lincoln and Washington and Garfield in frames. There were also pictures—unframed and evidently cut from periodicals—of John L. Sullivan, Theodore Roosevelt, and “The Giants of 1912.”

There was another book-case in the room, but that was kept locked, and had green baize back of the glass in the doors. The fact that one of the glass doors was broken made no difference about keeping the thing locked. This case contained the Judge’s treasures—trout flies, lines, reels, jointed-rods, and such. In it were also many things belonging to his boy clients, such as bats, balls, catcher’s masks and fielder’s gloves, and an assortment of other things, including a fine specimen of vermiform appendix preserved in a bottle of alcohol. The appendix had been removed from the interior of one of the boys—“Snootey” Judd; and that young man was very proud of exhibiting it to such persons as he deemed worthy of the honor, bringing them into the office at any time for that purpose. It was account of the

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high value placed on these things that they were kept in the book-case instead of the safe.

The floor near the walls was littered by all manner of papers and documents, many of them in old soap-boxes, or piled on two or three sleds, the Judge having allowed the use of the office for garage purposes during the summer seasons.

Every spring, unless he forgot it, the Judge had the windows cleaned, and once in so often, Easter Sunday Jackson would descend upon the office and make an attempt to "cl'ar up."

"Great Day, Jaidge!" Easter would say, as she looked around disapprovingly at the disorder, "dis ya offuss cert'n'y look scan'l'us. Jes' lemme giv' 'er a wallop, please, suh?" But the Judge put his foot down there.

"Land o' Goshen, Easter!" he exclaimed. "How do you expect me to find my papers, or anything, if you come and disturb things?"

Easter knew, perfectly well, that the Judge never could find anything, anyhow, and it was surprising that she allowed the protest to stand. However, as Alan Bailey slept in the small room off the office, Easter was allowed to "tidy-up" that, as a sort of compromise.

As soon as the Judge had closed the door of the private office, he unlocked the door of the book-case, and took therefrom a jointed fishing-rod, using

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the same care and precaution with which a Fifth Avenue jeweler takes a pearl necklace out of its case. He inspected it critically, and then sat down in his big, high-backed chair to re-wind the handle. While he was in the midst of this, Alan Bailey put his head in the door.

"Judge," said he, "there are three gentlemen waiting in the office to see you. Shall I show them in?" The Judge examined the winding minutely and displayed no enthusiasm over the call of clients.

"Oh, I suppose so," he said, finally, and in a slightly disgusted way; "I might as well have it over with. They didn't say what they wanted?"

"No," said Alan, gravely, "but it seems to be a matter of importance and requiring immediate attention."

"All right," said he, wearily, "let 'em come in."

The Judge rose from his chair and leaned the rod against the bookcase and regarded it lovingly. Through the door filed three small boys of about ten or eleven, but the Judge had his back to them and did not see them. The delegation included and was headed by "Fatty" Jennings, at whose door was laid any and every depredation that was committed in the town, if the identity of the miscreant was not otherwise conclusively established. The alibi had to be perfect or the matter was charged up to Fatty's account and proceedings were held

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accordingly. Fortunately, Fatty had a strong constitution and was most amply upholstered in that portion of his anatomy where such "proceedings" are usually visited. He had become so used to it that whenever he saw a licking, he would back right up to it—just like an East-Side dog to a tin can! Fatty had never, by any chance, been referred to as "teacher's pet," nor had anybody but the Judge ever called him a "gentleman." The Judge was, too, perhaps the only adult in town that didn't "shy" when he saw him coming, and make reproachfully pitying noises by putting the tongue against the teeth—"tsst, tsst!" accompanied by a shaking of the head. In short, the Judge was about the only person in town who seemed to think that Fatty was a human being and a healthy boy! And Fatty worshipped the Judge! All of which goes to show how much better it is to club a boy's head off than to treat him well!

"Snootey" Judd, so nominated on account of an excessively retrousse nose, was the son of Abner Judd and his wife, Samantha. For years, Abner had been just on the point of getting something to do, but had never quite accomplished it. His time, when not engaged in sitting in one of the chairs before Bradley's store, was largely occupied in dropping in on people who were busy, to discuss leading questions of the day and what "an all-fired mistake

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Congress and the president were makin'." He read all the papers—he had a regular newspaper route—where he "jes' thought I'd take a squint at yo'r paper; an' while I'm settin' here, I'll jes' he'p myself to a thimberful o' your smokin' tobacco. Ain't got a match handy, hev ye? I was aimin' to get some tobacco, but I clean disremembered to."

This formula was so well established that the host usually reached for the match at the same time Abner reached for the newspaper. If anything approaching courtesy were extended to him, Abner would deem the occasion auspicious for borrowing a quarter.

"Snootey," however, did not furnish any very great example of heredity—at least, not from his father. He was a funny, straightforward little chap, with a pair of honest, twinkly eyes that looked out at you from a mass—probably about four million, to be conservative—freckles. Next to the Judge, Snootey was probably the best posted person in town in regard to fish and how to catch 'em—and where. The third member of the delegation was none other than Epaphroditus Bogardus General Grant Jackson, alias "Jim." He lent color to the occasion. The boys stood for a moment, as the Judge did not look around, and then Fatty opened the meeting:

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"Good mornin', Judge," he chirruped. "We thought we'd come to see yuh."

The Judge turned quickly: "Well, I declare!" said he, coming to them and shaking hands; "I'm mighty glad to see you! I hadn't seen you boys in so long that I had begun to think mebbe you'd engaged other counsel! How is the fishing? I was just fixing up my old rod," and he exhibited it to them. The boys admired it greatly at a distance, but knew too much to touch it.

"The fishin' 's swell, Judge!" announced Fatty. "The catfish is bitin' good, and Snootey ketched a trout that long!" Fatty held his hands about eighteen inches apart; but, after deliberation, and an admiring gasp from the Judge, he reduced the distance some four or five inches.

"Nossah!" corrected Jim, "'Twan't no longer 'n dat," and he indicated a length about half an inch less than Fatty. It is well to be exact in matters of this kind.

"O-o-o-o-h, Judge!" protested Snootey, who was really the interested party, "'T was so! Pa said he sh'd jedge 't was near two pound! He e't it, an' he otta know!"

"Your father ate it—all of it?" asked the Judge, looking over his glasses.

"Yessir," said Snootey.

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"HMMMM," mumbled the Judge. "Didn't you and your ma want any of it?"

"I dunno 'bout Ma," said Snootey, "I know *I* did—but that didn't make any difference to Pa. He e't it."

"HMMMM!" ruminated the Judge. Then, after a moment, "Snootey, what do you reckon a two-pound trout—like your's—would bring in the open market—down to Bradley's store?"

"O-o-o-h Judge," interrupted Fatty, excitedly, "don't sell the trout to Bradley! He's a skin!"

"How's that, Fatty?"

"Well," said Fatty, ruefully, "I sold him a whole bushel o' hick'ry nuts las' fall—I didn't 'zackly sell 'em—I traded 'em to him."

"And what did you trade them for?" asked the Judge, interestedly.

"Six bottles of 'Gen-u-wine Indian Rheum'tism Cure,'" said Fatty, rolling the words sonorously. "He said I'd prob'ally have the rheum'tism, some day an' I wouldn't need no doctor 'f I had the medicine." After a pause, and as though he never *did* have any luck—— "But I ain't never had no rheum'tism yet! I wisht I hadn't a traded! But he said 'twas gen-u-wine!"

Jim looked Fatty over contemptuously: "Yo' cert'n'y is a suckah!" he said, pityingly.

The Judge thought the matter over for a moment:

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"What did you do with the bottles—I don't suppose you used any?"

"I got 'em home—in the barn," said Fatty. "Bradley wouldn't take 'em back. I used just a little. It smells terrible. I put some on our dog—where he had the mange, an' he hollered awful! He run away, an' we ain't saw him since." Then, after a pause, he added, "He was a good dog, too."

Jim swelled belligerently: "If 't was me," he said, trying to look like Atilla, "I'd bust a windah fer 'im, 'f he didn't take 'em back! Da's me!" And then, abandoning the swash-buckler air, he assumed that of the sage: "You gotta lib fer mebbe ninety y'ahs 'fo yo' gets de rheum'tism an' *den* mebbe yo' ain't go'n' git 'er."

"Well," temporized the Judge, "I don't know as I'd resort to violence—mebbe Bradley 'll change his mind. Anyway, we got away from the question—what was the trout worth?"

"Oh," said Fatty, loftily, "'bout a dime, I guess."

"I'd sell 'im fer a nickle," said Jim, moved by the spirit of competition.

"Lookey here," said Snootey, indignantly, "whose trout is this, anyway?"

"Look like it b'long to yo' Pa, now," suggested the practical Jim.

"Well, I wouldn't sell him fer less 'n fifteen cents

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to nobody—'les' 't was the Judge," announced Snoo-tey with finality.

"I appreciate the preference and the compliment," said the Judge, "but I don't just see how I am going to avail myself of the opportunity—under the circumstances! However, that fixes the price—fifteen cents. Now, what was on the committee's mind when it came in—what can I do for you?"

"We wanted you to show us how to make a figure-4 trap," said the boys in chorus.

"Nobody's education is complete until he knows how to do that," said the Judge. "Just step over here." He went to the table, and the committee gathered around eagerly, a slight friction among the boys resulting over the occupation of advantageous positions. The Judge took a pen, a ruler, and a paper-cutter, and endeavored to demonstrate the trap, but he was plainly not satisfied with his efforts. He went over to the window, after looking fruitlessly about the room, and took the stick from the bottom of the curtain. Of course, the curtain shrivelled up in a mussy way, but neither the boys nor the Judge noticed it; and the Judge proceeded to cut the proper notches in the sticks.

"If a thing is worth doing at all," said the Judge, looking over his glasses at them, "it is worth doing well. And besides, if this delegation sees fit to

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come to me for professional advice, they are entitled to expert opinion."

This time, everything seemed right; and Snootey got a large box from the corner, dumping out its contents on the floor—there was nothing in it but some legal documents, anyhow. The Judge set the trap on the table, putting some law-books on the box to give it weight. "Now, you see, it's just this way," said he, "you put the bait here, and the animal walks in here and grabs it—down comes the box, and he's caught." The Judge pulled at the bait, the sticks collapsed, and the heavy box, with its load of law-books—"to make 'er hol' 'im fas'," as Jim suggested—came down on the table, upsetting the ink.

At that moment Alan entered.

"Judge," said he, "Mr. Belcher, the president of the bank, is waiting to see you—I told him you were in a conference. Mrs. Simpson is out there, too. I am of the opinion that Mrs. Simpson—ahem—contemplates 'a touch.' Shall I get rid of her?"

"No," said the Judge, as he wiped up the ink with his handkerchief, "tell her I'll see her in a minute."

"How about Belcher?" asked Alan.

"He can wait or not—just as he likes. Show Mrs. Simpson in." The Judge cleared away the wreck from the table, and gave each of the boys one of the sticks in a diplomatic effort to show no partiality, just as Mrs. Simpson came in.

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"Have a chair, Mrs. Simpson—I'll be right with you in a minute," he said hospitably, shaking her hand cordially, and going to the door with the boys.

"By the way," he said, "what particular kind of animal are you boys going to catch with that trap?"

"Skunks," said Jim

"Oh, Lord! Be careful!" cautioned the Judge, hastily and fervently. "A skunk ain't half so hard to catch as he is to let go! I remember catching a skunk once—ha, ha, ha, ha!" and the Judge broke into a loud and long laugh—"I'll tell you about it some time. Let me know how the trap works—but I'd be almighty careful about skunks! Now you run along while I talk to Mrs. Simpson."

CHAPTER III

MRS. SIMPSON was a widow of about fifty-five. If she had ever had anything but hard luck, it is not recorded—real, genuine hard luck. Not bad judgment, not mismanagement; nothing that could be foreseen. She wasn't the kind that deserved it, either. She had worked hard, conscientiously and faithfully, all her life, but death and disease and disaster had been dealt out to her by Providence as a steady diet; and though she struggled hard against the Fates—she wasn't the kind that wanted to lean on anybody—it seemed to be “up-hill all the way.”

“Well, Mrs. Simpson!” said the Judge, cheerily, as he hitched his chair up close to hers, “I’m glad to see you. I had sort of calculated on dropping in to see you, but I’ve been so busy—one thing and another. You’re looking right well.”

“Oh, I s’pose I’m ’bout the same as ever, Martin, fur as health ’s concerned; but it does seem as tho’ I have to keep pesterin’ you. Seems ’s tho’ I always have to come to you in the end—though Lord knows there don’t seem to be no end—not in sight, anyhow. What with the road-tax an’ the school-tax an’ the

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in'trest an' the insurance on the barn an' a sight of other things that's all the time comin' up, seems 's tho' I might jest as well give up an' go to the county farm right now!"

"Pshaw, Mrs. Simpson! What makes you talk like that! I don't believe there's anything you and I can't straighten out if we tackle it together. What particular kind of a tax is stinging you just now?"

"'T ain't no tax—I jest paid all o' them, an' that left me flat broke, as my Enoch used to say. It's the int'rest on that note I give Joe Belcher two years ago when I was tryin' to pay off Enoch's debts—after he died. Joe says he can't wait no longer—says the int'rest is accrued, or somethin'. He kin be mighty mean, when he sets out to be. He is settin' out there in your office now. I reckon mebbe he's come t' get you to put the law on me."

"He knows better'n to ask me to do that I guess—he ought to, anyway.

"How much has Joe got to have?" asked the Judge.

"Nineteen dollars an' twenty-two cents. It don't seem like a gre't sight o' money—but it's a lot to me—an' to Joe," she added.

"I reckon it looks bigger to Joe than it does to you. Well—nineteen dollars and twenty-two cents, eh? I guess we can manage to get together nineteen-twenty-two—between us," said the Judge confi-

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dently, and he started to search his pockets—"some-where," he added, as the search failed to bring anything to light. The Judge looked at his bank-book on the table, but closed it hurriedly. "Now you just rest easy, Mrs. Simpson. We'll manage that little matter—I'll see that you get it by to-morrow morning at the latest—mebbe to-day. You tell Joe that I said so. I got a few other things I want to say to Joe, too, sometime." The expression on the Judge's face did not indicate that Joe was going to hear anything very pleasant. "Now you just run along home and don't give the matter another thought."

Mrs. Simpson rose and looked at the Judge gratefully as she went toward the door. "You've been a heap o' help to me, Martin Peabody, ever since my poor Enoch died—an' before, too, for that matter. I don't know how I could a got on without you—I guess I couldn't a got on a tall." Mrs. Simpson sniffed just a little and the end of her nose got red. "An' I ain't no idee when I'm goin' to be able to pay ye!"

"Mrs. Simpson," said the Judge, as he put his hand on her shoulder tenderly, "you don't owe me a cent! I'd like to know how any of us could get along if somebody didn't help us once in a while. We all have to lean a little—some more'n others, though Lord knows you ain't the leaning kind. But if I was to start to tell you how much other people do for

me—why, I wouldn't have time to tend to any of my regular duties—or go fishing even! I tell you there ain't anybody independent! No, sir! When a man gets to thinking he is—bang! Down he goes! Most everybody gets in a fix, some time or other, and needs help. One of the most independent men I ever knew was Bill Peebles. He said he didn't either borrow or lend, and could paddle his own canoe. He always allowed he could get along all right without help from anybody—and I believe he included God, and wouldn't ask even Him for help! Yes, Ma'am, he was some self-reliant, and bragged about it. Well, one time, he and I were fishing up in the Adirondacks, and Bill crawled into a sort of a narrow cave to see what was in there. He found two bob-cat cubs, not more'n a month old; and when he started to crawl out—the hole was so small he had to crawl out backwards, on all fours—he met the old bob-cat comin' in. My stars! Did you ever see a wild-cat perform? You see, Bill wasn't in much of a position to put up a fight, being as he was backing out and didn't have a gun or anything, and he lost almost all of his independence right there—and—ha, ha!—a good deal more besides! A twenty-eight pound wild-cat, with kittens, can kick up more fuss than twenty-eight pounds of dynamite! Yes, sir! If you don't think Bill hollered for me to help him, you can have another guess! I got hold of

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the bob-cat's tail—what there was of it—and I hung onto it; and judging from Bill Peebles' remarks, I guess the bob-cat hung on to him—though now and again some of him would give way, and then the bob-cat 'd take a fresh holt! You never see a man lose independence and trousers and chunks of himself like Bill Peebles did! Well, we all got out, finally—the cat and I and most of Bill. I was tolerable well scratched up myself, and it was a good thing that I had brought a gun along.”

The Judge wiped his face with his handkerchief, forgetting that there was ink on it, until Mrs Simpson called his attention to it. “After Bill Peebles was able to sit up,” continued the Judge, “he didn't have so much trouble standing as he did sitting—he never bragged any more about being so independent—not when I was present, he didn't! And I guess that's about the way it is with all of us, tho' some have to get an awful jolt to convince 'em.”

“That's the first good laugh I've had in a coon's age,” said Mrs. Simpson, as she wiped her eyes. “You certainly do make a body feel like livin'! An' I'm goin' to say this, Martin Peabody, that if at any time, spot, or place I can ever be of any help to you—though the Lord knows I don't wish you to get into any fix where you *do* need help—I'll be mighty glad! That sounds a little left-handed, but I mean good!”

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"It's mighty nice of you to say so, Mrs. Simpson, and you may be sure that if I do, I'll call on you!"

"Well, I'll say good-by, Martin—and thank ye again!"

"No occasion for thanks, at all, Mrs. Simpson. And you just rest easy about that little matter of nineteen-twenty-two."

The door had hardly closed behind Mrs. Simpson when Mr. Belcher strode majestically into the room. "Good morning, Judge," he said. "Your clerk went over to his job at Bradley's, and as I saw you were through with Mrs. Simpson, I just came in."

The Judge was examining the rod again, and made no reply. "Going fishing?" asked Belcher.

"I think mebbe—if I get the time," said the Judge.

Belcher smiled at the idea of the Judge ever being pressed for time. He took a cigar from his pocket and offered it to the Judge. "No, thanks," said the latter, "I usually smoke a pipe." Then, after a pause, he asked, as tho' starting a conclusion, "You don't go fishing much, do you, Belcher?"

"Well, no—not since I was a boy," said Belcher, smiling in a tolerant sort of way. "I can't say that I'm very fond of it."

"Well," said the Judge, as he tried the joints of the rod, "fishing takes a man off by himself a good deal, and if the fish don't bite fast, he has a lot of

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time to sit and think. If a man hasn't got a pretty clear conscience, he's in mighty uncomfortable company when he's alone."

"Oh, I say, Martin! You don't mean to say that I haven't an easy conscience, do you?" asked Belcher in a grieved tone.

"I didn't say 'easy'—I said 'clear.' I guess your conscience is 'easy,' all right."

"Oh! Then you don't think my conscience is very clear?" asked Belcher, nettled, but putting on a good-natured face. The Judge made no reply. Belcher went on: "You know, Martin, you and I don't always look at things in the same light. I suppose that you—and others—think that I am a hard man—severe and heartless at times. But you must realize that it is business—the bank's business. I have to look after the interests of the stockholders and the depositors, and I have to be exacting with delinquents. If it were my own money, now, it would be different. And speaking of delinquents, I want you to do a little work for me—er—for the bank. I want you to go over to the county-seat and run down the title of Mrs. Simpson's property—she was in here just now. I—the bank wants to know just how the property stands."

The Judge still fussed with the fishing-rod. When he spoke, it was slowly, with pauses between the words.

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"Well—Belcher"—here he took a long time, something very particular requiring his attention at the rod, "I don't know as I can—spare the time—just now. I calculate—I'm going to be right busy—one thing and another."

"Fishing—for one thing, I suppose," said Belcher, with as much of a sneer in his tone as he dared.

"Likely as not," said the Judge indifferently, laying the rod on the table. As he did so, a memorandum caught his eye, and the Judge started.

"All right, if you don't want the job," said Belcher, rising.

"Wait a minute," said the Judge, fingering the memorandum. "I didn't say I didn't want the job—I said I expected to be busy. I'll do the job for you—but—I want my fee right now—in advance."

"Why, certainly," said Belcher, reaching into his pocket. "That's all right. How much will you charge?"

"Nineteen dollars and twenty-two cents," answered the Judge.

CHAPTER IV

ABNER JUDD peeked into the open door of the outer office, and assuring himself that Alan Bailey was not there, he stepped quickly inside and proceeded to the inner room. The Judge was engaged in writing out a deed in long-hand.

"Good mornin', Jedge," said Abner cheerfully, as he seated himself and reached for the county newspaper from which the Judge had not yet removed the wrapper, "I jest had time to drop in and take a squint at the *Weekly Windbag*. You don't mind if I take jest a thimbleful o' your smokin', do ye?" and Abner filled a very large pipe which he extracted from his hip-pocket. The Judge fumbled in his pocket and handed him a match without looking up from his work. Abner scratched it on his trousers' leg and it broke and fell to the floor.

"I swan! Matches ain't made to burn, now-a-days—jest made to sell! Could you let me have 'nuther?" The Judge gave it to him, and Abner lighted his pipe. After taking a few seemingly very satisfactory puffs, with the air of a connoisseur, he said, "This here is some tol'able good smokin' tobacco, Jedge—where 'd ye get it? I was aimin' to

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get some at Bradley's but I clean disremembered to." The Judge did not answer, but this did not discourage Abner in the slightest. "I seen that boy o' mine pesterin' around here consid'ble. I swan! I can't seem to do nuthin' with him—he's jes' nach'er'ly shif'less and triflin'. Goes fishin' most o' the time."

The Judge looked up from his work: "I shouldn't think you'd want to discourage his going fishing—he brings home quite a mess of fish, now and then, don't he?"

"Well," said Abner, with judicial deliberation, "not reg'lar, not reg'lar—jest now an' then, like you said. By Crimus, though, he brung home a trout t'other day that was a hum-dinger! That big!" and Abner held his hands about twelve or fourteen inches apart. "I swan! That there trout was 'bout the finest I've saw in quite a spell! Fine flavor an' everything. I wisht you could of saw it!" And again Abner indicated, with a great show of precision, the exact size of the trout.

"Fine flavor, eh?" asked the Judge.

"Prime!" answered Abner, with enthusiasm.

"What would it bring at Bradley's?" asked the Judge.

"Huh!" said Abner, "I dunno what Bradley 'd give—he's pretty clost. But I reckon most anybody 'd give a quarter fer one like it."

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"Certainly worth fifteen cents?" said the Judge, tentatively.

"Every cent o' that!" said Abner, decidedly.

"I'll bet Snootey liked it," said the Judge. "There's no trout has such a flavor as the one you catch yourself."

Abner squirmed a trifle, and began to take off the wrapper from the newspaper. "Snootey?" temporized Abner. "Well, I—that is, he—y' see, the' wasn't 'nuff of it to go round—very far. 'T wa'n't no such rip-snortin' trout!" Here Abner indicated the probable size—not more'n eight or ten inches. 'T wa'n't nuthin' to speak of—not when y' cum t' eat it—after S'manthy had cleaned and cooked it!" Abner busied himself with the newspaper, holding it between himself and the Judge.

"How is Samantha, these days? I don't see her out very much," continued the Judge, taking another tack.

"Well—only kind o' tol'able—not real first-rate. Sort o' low-sperrited an' complainin'. Makes it pretty hard fer me," and Abner sighed as he thought how hard it is to have a "low-sperrited" wife.

"She must have enjoyed the trout—after all that salt pork and hominy she had all winter—fairly regular?" pursued the Judge.

"Good Gawd, Jedge! Ain't I said it wa'n't no hell-roarin' big trout! S'manthy didn't say she

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wanted none—guess she'd a said it quick 'nuff if she had," and Abner crossed and uncrossed his legs in a way that indicated that he was extremely uncomfortable.

"So you ate it all, eh?" questioned the Judge, mercilessly.

"Land o' Goshen! Yas! I e't it all—if you want t' put it that way. What's all this fuss about a little bit uv trout, anyway? I could uv e't ten uv 'em at a settin'!" And Abner gave a very good imitation of a worm on a hot skillet, and tried to bury himself in the newspaper.

The Judge looked at Abner in an appraising way that made Abner cross and uncross his legs again and hold up the paper between himself and the Judge in the manner of a shield, but it was not altogether effective.

"I thought you said it was a hum-dinger of a trout?" Not getting any reply to this, the Judge went on: "How many of 'em do you suppose Samantha and Snootey could eat at a sitting—'specially as they didn't have much but hog and hominy all winter—when they were lucky?"

"Shucks, Jedge, I ain't no idee—they ain't neither uv 'em over-fond o' fish! I jest e't it to keep it from spoilin' round the house!" And Abner assumed an air of virtue as a strict conformist to Hooverian doctrine. Before the Judge could pursue the unpleas-

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ant subject any further, Abner's eye lighted on an item in the paper that was a life-saver for him.

"Look 'e here, Jedge!" he exclaimed, with great animation and interest, and he proceeded to read laboriously, running his finger along the lines, "This here paper says thet, 'Missis Agatha Loring an' her da'ter, Ruth, hev returned frum abroad after a stay uv many years——' "

The Judge jumped from his chair and grabbed the paper out of Judd's hand and scanned the article eagerly; and then, after a moment, he sank into his chair and read the article again. It was now Abner's turn to look appraisingly at the Judge, and his face broke into a cunning and speculative smile.

"You oughta remember her, Judge," Abner began, watching the Judge narrowly to see the effect of his words. "'F I 'member right, seem t' me you was a leetle sweet on her fer quite a spell—wasn't y' now?"

Failing to get a rise out of the Judge with this, Abner went on, grinning: "'S I 'member her, she was a mighty putty gal!"

The Judge made no response; though his eyes were on the newspaper, his mind was evidently far away. The opportunity being favorable, Abner reached a tentative hand toward the tobacco, and as there were no deterrent signs on the Judge's part, he helped himself liberally, putting most of it into his pocket.

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“’S I ’member it,” Abner went on, as though feeling his ground, “her ’n you hed some kind uv a fuss, an’ she up an’ flew the coop ’ith that feller Loring. Seems he hed a heap o’ money. They went an’ lived in Yurrupe, er some sich place.” The Judge gave no sign of having heard, but the fact that a conversation was one-sided made no difference to Abner—he was used to that. After a pause he rambled on: “I heared he died. Folks says they wasn’t over-happy.”

The Judge sat up and looked at Judd severely: “What do you know about it?” he asked contemptuously and with indignation.

Abner hedged hastily: “*I ain’t sayin’ so—I jes’ said ‘folks says!’* I didn’t s’pose you was touchy ’bout her—yit!”

“‘Touchy’ has nothing to do with it,” said the Judge. “I’m against repeating what ‘folks say!’ If folks said that you were lazy and shiftless and selfish and didn’t take care of your family and were generally no-account, that wouldn’t *make* it so, would it?”

Abner bristled: “I’d jes’ like to hear somebody say it! Who said it?”

“I’m not saying that anybody said it,” protested the Judge. “But if somebody *did* say it, and then somebody else repeated what he had heard, and so

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on, it would get to be 'folks say,' after a while, wouldn't it?"

Abner looked much relieved to know that such a baseless description of him had not actually been drawn. "I s'pose that's the way things starts sometimes," he admitted slowly; and then, after a pause, "Prob'ally with gossipin' wimmen."

The Judge smiled. "And even such a preposterous hypothesis as I have just suggested gains credence by continual repetition."

"I—er—I s'pose so," agreed the bewildered Abner.

The Judge laid aside the newspaper, and busied himself with some of the documents on the table, but he was plainly abstracted, removing this and that, and then putting them back, in an aimless sort of way. Abner felt himself slipping—he had not accomplished the main object of his call, although he had done pretty well in the way of tobacco and literature. He eyed the Judge for a time; he didn't exactly like that "preposterous hypothesis" proposition, but he felt that he had, in a measure, cleared his skirts by the exhibition of his anxiety to meet anybody who had said such a thing. And yet, he could not altogether dismiss the matter from his mind, and he had a vague and undefinable and rather uncomfortable feeling that he didn't stand very well with the Judge, or the latter wouldn't have made him the subject of such an example of the way pernicious

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propaganda is spread, no matter how absurd that propaganda might be. Then, there was the trout incident—he felt that he had not come out of that with any great credit, though he comforted himself by the thought that he had convinced the Judge that “S’manthy an’ Snootey wasn’t over-fond o’ fish.” At any rate, there was nothing like trying; and, after one or two false starts, Abner said, “Jedge, I was aimin’ to borry a quarter off’n you till nex’ week—I got a chanct to git a job over to——”

“Yes, yes,” answered the Judge, “I know—but I have a job for you right now, and I’ll pay you a quarter for doing it.” The Judge picked up the money from the table where it had lain since Belcher had put it there and rolled it up into a wad. “You take this money—there’s nineteen-twenty-two there—over to Mrs. Simpson, and tell her I’m sorry that I couldn’t pay her before,” and the Judge handed the wad and a coin to Abner and resumed work on his papers. Abner tucked the wad of money into his pocket, and then examined the coin, looking in a puzzled way from the silver piece to the Judge and back again. He swallowed hard two or three times, and then said, “Look ’e here, Jedge, you said a quarter—this here’s on’y a dime!”

“Well,” said the Judge, looking at him over his glasses, “that’s right, ain’t it? You and I agreed that a good trout was worth about fifteen cents—

you always calc'late to pay your debts, don't you?"

Abner thought for some time, the light gradually breaking in upon him: "'S that what that there boy o' mine was doin' in here this mornin'?" he asked, "tellin' you——"

"I cannot discuss my clients' private business with any one, Abner!" interrupted the Judge, with finality, and turned again to his papers. When Abner was half-way out of the door, the Judge called to him, "Look out, Abner, and don't get Mrs. Simpson's money mixed up with yours!"

"The' ain't much danger," said Abner, disgustedly, as he closed the door.

CHAPTER V

THE arrival of Mr. Jim Ramsay in Spring Valley had occasioned little more than a passing notice; but when he emerged from the bank and proceeded up the street and turned into Judge Peabody's office, the sitters over at Bradley's store sat up and took notice. It was well known that the Judge and Ramsay "didn't jibe," though it was equally well known that the fault—if it could be called a fault—was entirely the Judge's. He disapproved of Ramsay, and made no secret of it; in fact, there had been several occasions when the Judge had expressed himself unequivocally to Ramsay himself. It was incomprehensible to Abner Judd and a quorum of Bradley's "parliament," that the Judge refused to enter into business relations with a man of Ramsay's undoubted influence and power; and the conclusion of this body politic was, "that dern fool Peabody don't know which side his bread's buttered on." So when Ramsay stepped into the outer room of the Judge's "suite," Alan Bailey looked up from his book in surprise.

"Hello, Alan," said Ramsay, in a friendly tone,

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shifting his cigar over to the port side of his mouth—"the Judge in?"

"I think so," said Alan, a trifle coldly, as he rose from his chair and went to the private office, Ramsay following close at his heels.

"He was here, a moment ago," said Alan, looking about the empty room; "he probably went out the back way. Shall I try to find him for you?"

"No," said Ramsay, smiling tolerantly, "don't bother. I'll wait a few moments for him. I suppose he's out with some of the kids. I wouldn't be a bit surprised to see him playing marbles or tops with 'em!" Ramsay shook his head and did a trick or two with the cigar: "The Judge isn't a bit older at fifty than he was at fifteen. He just simply never grew up."

"Well," said Alan, reservedly, "I think he gets more out of life than any one I know—more than most people think. It is certainly a very beautiful thing to keep young—that way."

"There isn't any objection to a man's keeping young," said Ramsay, examining his cigar, "we all try to do that—in a reasonable and sensible way; but this bein' a damn fool an' messing around with a lot of ten-year old boys, the way he does—neglecting his business for 'em, letting opportunities slide—he don't seem to have any idea about practicality or his own interests! Why, he's just as leave hold up

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a meeting of a board of directors—keep 'em waiting, any time, to play with a child! I've seen him do it! Men of affairs ain't goin' to stand for such nonsense!" And Ramsay, being satisfied, apparently, with the condition of his cigar, put it back into his mouth and tilted it up at an acute angle. Alan smiled and looked at the ceiling: "If you refer to the board of directors of the local bank, I don't know that I'd criticise the Judge—for that!"

Ramsay smiled and shifted the cigar. "You've got your little hammer out, too, haven't you!" Then he added, after a pause, "How are you getting on with the law?"

"Well, I'm reading pretty hard—nights," said Alan. "I don't get much chance during the day. My job at Bradley's keeps me fairly well occupied—Bradley doesn't pay wages for nothing."

"No," said Ramsay, smiling, "I imagine not. How does Bradley stand on this question—allowing the trolley-line to go through the cemetery?" Alan laughed. "I guess Bradley stands any way you want him to—on his head, if you suggested it."

"And the Judge?" asked Ramsay.

"I believe he is strongly against it," answered Alan, "though he isn't the kind that talks very much." Then after a pause, Alan added, "I thought you understood, pretty well, how the Judge stands?"

"Well," said Ramsay, slowly pacing back and

forth, and again examining his cigar critically, "I know how he *says* he stands—but——" Ramsay paused, and then looked quickly at Alan: "You don't suppose he is looking for anything, do you?"

"I do not," said Alan, in a cold and positive tone. "I'm afraid you don't know the Judge very well, or you wouldn't suggest anything like that."

"May be, may be!" said Ramsay, hastily. "Sometimes, though"—Ramsay picked off shreds from the chewed end of the stub and threw them away. "You know, as a politician, I have dealt with so many kinds of people—people you wouldn't ever think ——." He stopped, lighted a fresh cigar from the stump of the old one, but didn't seem inclined to go on with what he had started to say.

Alan took up the thread: "They weren't people like the Judge!" he said. "He's the whitest, cleanest soul that ever lived! I get a pretty good chance to study him at close range. What does he care about money? Did you ever see him *with* any? He makes a good deal, too—could make ten times as much, if he cared to. All he cares about it is to give it away. I'd hate to be the man who offered him a bribe!"

"Who said anything about 'offering him a bribe?' " asked Ramsay, virtuously.

Alan laughed sardonically: "You did," he said.

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"What else could you mean by wondering 'if he is looking for anything?' "

Ramsay tried to look hurt. "You put a very harsh construction on things, Son," he said, eyeing Alan appraisingly. "Payment—reward for services performed—either in money or preferment, political or otherwise—doesn't necessarily involve the idea of bribery."

Alan Bailey was a young man, but he could see that here was an opportunity to satisfy himself, first hand, as to Jim Ramsay and his methods. He had no real doubt that Ramsay had resorted and would resort to almost any means to gain his ends, but Alan determined to see just how far he would go—if he would baldly commit himself.

"Well, possibly not," said Alan, with the air of one who hadn't taken all the circumstances into consideration. "I can conceive of cases where it would not." He paused and thought for a time, Ramsay looking at him sharply. "You think," Alan went on, "that some preferment—political or otherwise—might properly be extended to the Judge in this case, if he could be brought to see the matter in the right light—your light?"

Ramsay took his time about answering: "I think it would not only be proper, but that it would be due him," he said, judicially.

"And you would be willing to have me broach

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the subject to him, rather than it should come from you?"

"Well, yes," said Ramsay, slowly, biting his cigar and looking at the ceiling, before answering; "it might be better that way." Then he added, cautiously, "And in that case—you, too, would be considered——"

"I thought so!" said Alan, throwing off the mask. "Let me tell you something, Mr. Ramsay! You and all your power as boss of this county and all the dirty money and influence that are back of you couldn't induce the Judge to swerve a hair's breadth from what he thinks is right. If you knew how little he cared for preferment—such preferment as you could give him—you'd know you haven't a Chinaman's chance! And if you had any idea that I would act as a go-between in your rotten schemes, you don't know me, either!"

It had been said of Ramsay that "if you was to stick a knife in him in August he'd bleed ice-water," and judging from the way he received Alan's outburst, the description was not exaggerated. He looked at Alan and smiled amiably—the smile was amiable enough, but the eyes weren't; they were narrowed to slits, and belied the white teeth that glistened in the smile.

"You're quite a champion of the Judge, aren't you?" said he, shoving his hands deep into his trou-

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sers' pockets and rolling the cigar around his mouth. "And how do you stand on the question—the trolley-line question, I mean, of course?"

"I don't know that where I stand is a matter of any consequence, but since you asked me, I'm with the Judge—against it."

Ramsay permitted himself as much of a sneer as he felt was wise: "Sort of a 'yes-man' for the Judge, eh?"

"No," said Alan, quietly, controlling himself, "I'm not a 'yes-man' for the Judge, or anybody else. I have several personal reasons for being against it. But although I'm not a 'yes-man' for anybody, I am a 'no-man' for several people—you for instance. I'd be against anything you were for—you and Belcher and the gang—on principle! All I would need to know about any matter would be that you were for it!"

"Well, well!" laughed Ramsay, "you are, to say the least, a very frank young man."

"I think you invited any frankness that has come your way," said Alan, turning away.

"This is indeed refreshing," said Ramsay, "We'll have to——"

The entrance of the Judge prevented Ramsay from saying what he'd have to do, but he finished by saying, "Hello, Judge!"

The Judge nodded to him, and going to Alan he

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said, "I just ran down to the postoffice for a minute and meant to stop at Bradley's on my way back, but something drove it out of my mind. Would you mind telling Bradley, when you go back, that I calculate to 'tend to that tax matter he spoke to me about to-day—if I get the time. Don't forget to say, '*if I get the time.*' And just mention to him casually that I have an almighty fine lot of 'Genuine Indian Rheumatism Cure'—six bottles—no, five—one of 'em was used on a poor, mangy dog, and they do say it put a lot of life into him—made him step considerable lively, anyway. And tell Bradley I want to dispose of the five bottles cheap—about two and a half. I think mebbe Bradley 'll buy 'em."

Alan laughed: "Judge, I don't believe he will, at all! He had a lot of that stuff on the shelf for years and he traded it off to somebody. He thought it was a slick job to get rid of it!"

"Yes, I know," said the Judge, unconvinced, "but sometimes people part with things, they'd like to get back. 'T any rate, you just tell him I'll 'tend to that tax matter, *if I get the time*; and then tell him I've got the rheumatism cure for sale, and see what he says. Mebbe he may want to buy."

Alan laughed and went out of the door, and the Judge went to his table, laid down the bundle of letters that he had brought in, and began to open them.

"Going into the patent-medicine business, Judge?" asked Ramsay, jocosely, disregarding the rather chilly reception that had been extended to him.

"Jest takin' a flyer," said the Judge, not looking up from the letter. "What brings you to town? I see you're still at large."

"Oh, yes," said Ramsay, grinning. "They haven't managed to get anything on me—yet, though some people seem to be trying mighty hard. Have a cigar, Judge?" he asked, proffering it.

"No," said the Judge, reading an official-looking letter intently. Ramsay seated himself in a chair, and sprawled out comfortably; and after contemplating his cigar for some time, he said, "Judge, I came down to see you and Belcher and some of the others about that trolley-line."

The Judge looked over his glasses at Ramsay: "I suppose you had a hard time talking Belcher into your way of thinking?" he ventured, quizzically.

"Well," said Ramsay, slowly, "he thought the way you do—at first—had a lot of sentimental objections——"

"Who—Belcher?" interrupted the Judge, in amused amazement. "Yes, he's powerful strong on sentiment! It almost breaks his heart to foreclose a mortgage!" and the Judge shook with mirth.

"Well, he did," averred Ramsay, stoutly, "till he came to see what an advantage it will be to the town

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—be just the making of it! And look, Judge,” he continued, pulling out a large blue-print from his pocket and laying it on the table, “you can see for yourself there’s no other way for the road to go but through the cemetery—the topography of the land won’t permit it.”

“’T won’t, eh?” said the Judge, studying the blue-print intently.

“No,” said Ramsay, as he bent over and ran his finger along the map, “you can see it won’t. You see those hills? They’re almost solid rock; and over this way by the river, it’s so marshy that the road couldn’t get a firm bed.

“Can’t get a firm bed, eh?” said the Judge looking up at Ramsay in an interested way, and with the air of a man who is beginning to understand things.

“No,” said Ramsay, warming up, “it’s almost a quick-sand. And it can’t go ’round over here because that would throw it clear out of the town.”

The Judge studied the map: “Looks so, don’t it,” he admitted, as if he were convinced. “What’s this—up here—in the cemetery?”

Ramsay bent over the map: “Oh, that?” he said, “that’s the Rutherford vault—you used to know the family, I guess. One of the girls—Agatha, I think it was—married that fellow Loring. The vault is a sight! . I can’t for the life of me see why people

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make such a fuss over a few dead ones—dead and forgotten!”

“Oh, yes,” said the Judge, slowly, as he studied the map. “Now I begin to get the lay of the land. This must be the Rogers’s plot, over here. Old Mrs. Rogers used to give me cookies and jam, something less’n a hundred years ago—when I was a boy! And here’s the Chamberlain plot, too, ain’t it? I knew all of that family, too. I guess I knew about everybody up there—seems ’s if I did, anyway.” The Judge looked over the map for a moment, and then put his finger on another place. “This is our family plot—right there,” he said, “right under a big elm. Have you ever been up there, Ramsay?”

“Why, I don’t know, Judge,” hesitated Ramsay. “I went up with the surveyors, but I don’t think I noticed the elm. I guess I was paying more attention to the line of the road.”

The Judge took off his glasses and turned around in his chair facing the man. “Well, you can’t imagine how beautiful and peaceful it is up there. The elm has a wide spread—its shade more than covers the plot. It almost seems to stretch out its arms over the graves of my father and mother and my brother in a protecting sort of way—seems to temper the wind and snow in the winter, and spread a cool carpet over them in the summer, with a kind of patch-work border of sunshine. A lot of birds

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nest in the elm—my mother was very fond of the birds, and 't seems as if, mebbe, they came there to be near her, and I love to think of her lying there and looking up at them and mebbe hearing 'em sing." The Judge turned again to the map with a sigh of what Ramsay took to be resignation, and put on his glasses: "But it looks as if that elm would have to come down—it's right in the way of the trolley," mused the Judge, "and the family 'd have to be moved."

"Well, yes," admitted Ramsay, hesitatingly, "possibly they would; but the trolley company will undoubtedly be willing to pay you a good figure."

"Oh, it would, would it?" said the Judge witheringly, as he rose from his chair and faced Ramsay. "The trolley 'll pay me 'a good figger' to roust out my father and my mother and my brother from their peaceful bed under the elm? The trolley 'll pay me 'a good figger' to say to my old mother, 'Come, Mother! Get up! The trolley company has paid me a good figure to drag you out of the home that belongs to you, and where you've been at rest all these years! It doesn't matter where you go now, Mother! You're dead and supposed to be forgotten!'"

"Why, Judge——" Ramsay began, taken aback at the Judge's change of front. The Judge turned on him fiercely: "You and your damn gang are goin'

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to pay me a good figger to say, 'Come on, Father—and you, too, Brother—I'm goin' to dig you up and dump you any old place to make way for the Ramsay-Belcher outfit of nickel-grabbin', stock-waterin', high-bindin' grafters! Up you come! The trolley company paid me a good figger to do it!'"

"But, Judge," said Ramsay, backing away from the old man's invective, "don't talk crazy! You know——"

"Crazy! Crazy—hell! You think they're only a lot of dead ones, do you? You think they're forgotten, do you? By God, I'll show you *I* haven't forgotten! If you think it is any part of my nature to turn on or forget those who loved and cherished and befriended me, you're a bigger damn fool than I took you for—and I knew you had a lot o' talent that way!"

"But, Judge! Listen——"

But there was no stopping the Judge.

"The trolley can't get a firm bed anywhere else, hey? Well, you can go bet that the bed of my folks and my friends up there in God's acre is firm enough—and it's goin' to stay firm! The Ramsay-Belcher trolley system ain't ever goin' to disturb it—not if I live, it ain't! The line can't go this way and it can't go that, can't it? Well, it can go to hell, for all I care—and that would make a nice, one-way trip for you and Belcher and the rest of you pirates!"

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The Judge walked up to Ramsay and slowly shook his finger beneath the latter's nose: "And I want to tell you, right now, Jim Ramsay, that if you, or anybody else, by your crooked, low-down, gum-shoe politics, ever manages to honswoggle this outrage through, the first spade that breaks the sacred soil of Sunset Hill, by the Living God, I'll make it a personal matter with you! And the only argument I'll use will be a sawed-off shot-gun! And you know, that I never broke my word to you in my life! I guess that 'll be about all to-day!"

When Mr. Ramsay came out of the office, he stood for a moment on the sidewalk, and removing his hat, wiped the perspiration from his face, which was very red. Then he went straight down to the station and took a train for somewhere. Alan Bailey came in and found the Judge sitting at his desk, looking very hard at the opposite wall. Alan laid some money on the table and started out. "What's that, Alan?" asked the Judge.

"It's two dollars and fifty cents," Alan replied, smiling. "Bradley says to send over the rheumatism cure."

The Judge chuckled: "I thought he would," he said. "Wait a minute, Alan," he added, as he fumbled in his pocket and brought out some coins. "Here's fifteen cents that belongs to Snootey Judd; the two and a half goes to Fatty Jennings—give it

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to 'em if you see 'em this afternoon, and tell Fatty to take the bottles over to Bradley. I'm going up to the county-seat to attend to that tax matter for him—I find I've got the time."

CHAPTER VI

THE old Loring home, about a mile from the business center of the village, and once the show-place of the county, had been closed for many years. It had not enjoyed even that perfunctory attention which a care-taker bestows upon his charge; and had it not been a most substantial, old place, it would long since have crumbled and grown into utter and irretrievable ruin. For a long time, it had been a thing that passing strangers pointed out with astonished concern, and had gone away and told of the fine, old estate "up Spring Valley way," that had been allowed to run wild and go to decay. Its broad piazzas were broken and weather-beaten and overgrown with vines; and here and there, a baluster was missing. Many of the windows were broken, and the holes gaped helplessly. In summer, weeds covered the lawns and gardens, and encroached upon and almost obliterated the walks and driveways. The unkempt trees interlocked their boughs, and some of them lay upon the ground, or leaned in lethal embrace against their nearest neighbor, the victims of wind and lightning. The hedges and

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shrubbery had grown rank and had lost all symmetry and proportion.

The spacious stables, too, had fared ill; the big double doors hung from one hinge, although they were securely locked in the middle by a rusty and inutile padlock. Everything had gone to seed or to the dogs; and at first glance, the labor required to restore things to anything approaching their former well-ordered condition would have seemed Augean.

But when Agatha Loring sent word from Paris that she was coming with her daughter, to occupy the old place, and to make Spring Valley her home, an army of gardeners and carpenters and painters and plumbers and glaziers and ever so many more folk got to work; and in a month, the whole estate had seemingly renewed its youth in a most astonishing manner. And although it is impossible to entirely repair or even conceal the ravages of Time and the processes of Nature, the house and grounds began to assume a certain groomed, if incongruous air, such as a very old and wrinkled woman has when she puts on a modish evening-gown and decks herself with a profusion of jewelry.

Lawns—at least, velvet ones—are not made in one summer, and a shapely hedge takes far longer than that. It would take years to “grow” the old place back to middle age. But Art and artisans had done all that could be done, and it was with a sigh,

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almost of satisfaction, that Agatha stepped from her car and looked again upon the place that, for a brief period in her early married life, had been her home.

Her's had been a run-away marriage; and with the waning of the honey-moon, young Loring had brought her back for a time, until he succumbed to the ennui and boredom of the town of Spring Valley, or of the State of Matrimony. And then, they had packed up, bag and baggage, and sailed away for Europe, leaving behind such Lares and Penates as either of them possessed.

Loring had no ties at all, except those which bound him to Agatha. His father and mother had died the year before his marriage, leaving him a vast estate, of which the home at Spring Valley was but a small item; and once he had become inoculated with the virus of European capital life, with its thousand complaisances that exactly suited his taste as well as his moral code, he never came back to America, even for a visit.

With the birth of her daughter, Ruth, Agatha became entirely engrossed in the child—engrossed so entirely that it was a matter of complete indifference to her what her husband did or where he went; and as this suited Jimmy Loring, they got on very well together—that is, very well—but not together. In fact, the only, and certainly the most

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interesting news that Agatha had of him for a long time, was when she got word that he had died in Naples, in a more or less ignominious manner. And Agatha determined, then and there, that as soon as Ruth had completed the convent course upon which she was launched, that she would sail for America and never leave it again.

Agatha Loring, at forty-five, was a very handsome woman. There was about her that indefinable charm that emanates from a combination of education, good-breeding, good-looks, money, health, and several other equally important factors in the human equation. There was not one physical trait that could be called extraordinary, or even unusual; and yet, in combination, the whole was most unusual. She was neither tall nor short, stout nor thin, dark nor light; and yet with this basis of mediocrity, there was not a particle of mediocrity about her. She had fine eyes—very changeable ones—often limpid and tender and appealing; and in the next second, blazing with a dangerous glint.

Her features were regular, with straight nose and a rounded chin—rather a firm chin, but not too firm—not firm enough to detract from her femininity. She was beginning to take on a little flesh, but not so much as to make her look more than “comfortable”—as they expressed it in Spring Valley. Broadway would have put it, “She still had a figure,

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not a number." Her hair was heavy and of a shade "betwixt and between," and there were a few—a very few—threads of white in it. People who did not like her and those who were vexed at her, had, on occasion, called her "red-headed." But folks who get very angry are said to "see red," and that phenomenon probably accounts for it.

Agatha was, withal, a good deal of a contradiction—chameleon-like; docile and tractable at most times, and yet highly inflammable and apt to fly off at a tangent. Zeke Pegnum, who had worked for her family for many years and who had had opportunity to study her at close range, used to say of her, as a girl: "The' ain't no cal'calatin' her a tall! T' look at 'er, y'd think she was gentle as a kitten—stan' 'ithout hitchin' an' a lady cud drive 'er. An' so she was, too—most gener'ly. An' then, by Crimus, she'd shy off at a piece o' paper in the rud, er mebbe fer no reason a tall, she'd back inta th' britchin' an' kick over th' traces, an' all hell cudn't do nuthin' with 'er! An' 't wan't 'dvis'ble to use no whip—not ef y' valued th' buggy!" And shaking his head solemnly, he would add, "Y' cudn't never give no guar'ntee with 'er—not no time!"

And Zeke, withal, was a pretty accurate diagnostician. She had, undoubtedly, many virtues; but if asked to select a fault, those who knew her would beyond peradventure, have selected the same one

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as being most prominent, though they might not have agreed as to its name. Her friends would have said, "She is impulsive, to a degree." Those not her friends would have said, "She has a frightful temper." And those who remembered her as a girl would have ventured, "She was jest the least mite 'skittish.'" And these, after all, mean about the same thing. She had never loved Jimmy Loring, but in a fit of "temper" she had been "impulsive" enough and "skittish" enough to run away with him. She had rued it bitterly, but she was game enough to play the string out to the end—not, perhaps, on account of any ethical tenets, but purely on account of pride—the pride (if "pride" it is) that is willing to suffer and endure, rather than to admit a mistake. (That sort of "pride" has been called other names not nearly so euphonious!)

Ruth, her daughter, was a girl of about twenty; and it took but one look to convince the most skeptical that there was nothing whatever the matter with Ruth—physically, mentally, and spiritually. She was tall and lithe and brown—brown of hair and eyes and skin—the brown that is the hall-mark of the "out-of-doors." She fairly radiated exuberant health and effervescent spirits—radiated a certain breezy gladness and gaiety that were highly contagious and irresistible. For Ruth, all music was in

waltz-time, and every day was "Saturday, the fourteenth!"

Her energy was dynamic, and she was as active as a squirrel. Her eyes were set wide apart, under a broad, low forehead, and nothing ever seemed to get by them, despite the fact that they were shaded by lashes so thick that they appeared to be "furry." Her small nose was tilted up just far enough to escape being inquisitive—and there were seven freckles on it! Any girl who thinks freckles are not becoming should be referred to Ruth Loring. If they are not, why did young men always want to count those on Ruth's nose? Unanswerable! "Dimples in the cheek" are all right, in their way, but freckles on the nose—irresistible!

When Ruth smiled, she showed thirty-two perfect teeth—*smiled*, not laughed!—which renders any further description of her mouth unnecessary. And the entire combination of features spelled "mischief" as plain as any letters could.

She had a certain swing and freedom of movement that bespoke vigor and elasticity and athletic training. And while she was distinctly feminine and maidenly, you felt, as you watched her walk or run or at any out-door game, that it was a pity that skirts had ever been invented and were practically compulsory! In fact, it is doubtful whether Diana of the Chase or The Dryads or the Water-

Nymphs could or would have performed many of their justly celebrated athletic feats or have made half the "hit" they did had they been hampered by even a creation from Worth's or Paquin's or Lady Duff-Gordon's. And it is more than probable that they would never have been painted and sculptured into a tithe of their present popularity, if twentieth-century sartorial requirements had prevailed at that time. From that point of view, Ruth was born three or four thousand years too late to show to the best advantage, as it is highly improbable that any of the above-mentioned ladies "had anything on" Ruth!

Ruth was, to put it mildly, most unconventional—conventions meant nothing in her young life except things to be broken. And yet, the reprehensibility of breaking of conventions depends almost entirely upon who breaks them. Let one girl break a convention, and people scowl and get shocked and say, "Tut, tut!" When another girl does exactly the same thing, the same people grin and feel tickled and say, "Isn't she charmingly unconventional!" Ruth belonged to the latter class. Dicky Whittlesey, habitat Fifth Avenue and Newport, but who had haunted Paris for the last three years in a more or less fruitless pursuit of Ruth, always said, "That girl can pull more rough stuff and get away with it than any other six people I ever knew!"

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"I think," said Agatha, one morning shortly after her arrival home, "that I better drive over to the village to-day and see Martin Peabody about taking charge of my affairs. I know that I shall get them into an awful mess if I don't."

"Good!" said Ruth, tossing aside the book she had been reading, and jumping to her feet, and seizing her mother playfully, held her at arms' length. "I'll drive. And you better bring along money enough to pay the fine, for I am going 'to step on her!'"

"You are going to do nothing of the kind—neither drive nor 'step on her!'" said Agatha, making a vain effort to wriggle out of her daughter's grasp. "I'm not going to risk my life with you again very soon! Where in the world do you hear so much slang? 'Step on it!'"

"Why, that is not really slang, Agatha." (Ruth had a playful way of calling her mother by her first name—it would have sounded most disrespectful in almost any other girl, but when Ruth did it, there seemed to be nothing wrong about it.) "That is a descriptively technical term. You see, the pressure of the foot on the accelerator allows an increased quantity of gas to enter the thingamajig, according to Dicky Whittlesey——"

"Bother Dicky Whittlesey!" said Agatha, who had given up struggling, despairingly. "Am I never

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to cease hearing of Dicky Whittlesey? I brought you back from Paris very largely to get away from him, and you are forever quoting him! You can just dismiss him from your mind."

"I shall not dismiss Dicky Whittlesey," said Ruth, shaking a warning finger at her mother, "he is too useful." I intend to hold Dicky over your head as a sort of human Sword of Damocles that may fall any minute, unless you let me do exactly as I want at all times! I have but to send him a cable or a wireless, or something, and he will fly to my side and rescue the poor, abused maiden from the heartless cruelty of her Gorgon mother!"

"Yes—well, I'd just like to see you cable him! After the bother I've had getting rid of him! Now you let me go—I've got to dress, and so have you."

"Agatha," said Ruth, severely, holding her mother off and looking searchingly into her face, "all this dressing up means something—don't you dare tell me it doesn't! There is something between you and this Peabody man! I have long suspected it! You have talked more about him lately than I have about Dicky Whittlesey! And now, you are going to *call* on him—actually going to pursue the poor, old thing in this brazenly shameless manner! Fie! Agatha! Oh, fie!"

"Don't be such a goose!" said Agatha, with a faint blush. "I'm going to see him on business."

I've known Martin Peabody ever since I was a child. Let me go!"

"Yes—I know all about this 'ever-since-we-were-children-together-thing,' said Ruth, reprovingly, releasing Agatha and kissing her. "Belated romances always begin that way! I shall go along as chaperon and see that you conduct yourself properly. Besides, I want to look him over—I may not approve of him, at all—any more than you approve of Dicky Whittlesey!"

CHAPTER VII

ALAN BAILEY had just come over to the office when Agatha's car, with Ruth at the wheel, stopped at the door and the two women made their way into the outer room. Alan rose in his most Chesterfieldian manner to receive them, notwithstanding the fact that he was in his shirt-sleeves and that his clothes bore unmistakable evidence that he had been engaged in putting a barrel or two of flour into seven-pound packages over at Bradley's.

It is a well-known fact, however, that no amount of flour on his clothes can make a gentleman look other than what he is; and furthermore, if nature has been lavish with her gifts—as she had been to Alan Bailey—it takes a much better brand of camouflage than flour to blind or pervert the vision of an exceedingly good-looking, healthy, and capable young woman of twenty when she is looking at a young man. And, therefore, Alan Bailey did not appear to such a disadvantage at might be supposed—as he supposed.

"Is Judge Peabody in?" asked Agatha, pleasantly, as she looked Alan over.

"I think so, Madam," answered Alan, in his best

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manner. "Whom shall I announce to him?" Now Alan spoke to Agatha, but it must be confessed that he looked at Ruth.

"If he is alone," said Agatha, "I would prefer not to be announced at all. I am Mrs. Loring, a very old friend of Mr. Peabody's, and I would enjoy surprising him." Alan bowed with a dignity and grace that Ruth felt instinctively had never been acquired altogether in Spring Valley, and opened the door to the inner office, standing aside to let the ladies pass.

Agatha and Ruth entered, but not before Ruth had given Alan a brazenly coy smile and a glance from under drooped and maidenly lidded eyes, that disturbed that young man's peace of mind for many a long day—and night.

The Judge was at his desk, a mass of documents and papers heaped up on either side of him, and, as was his custom, he did not look up immediately when the door opened. Agatha looked at him for a moment, and then advanced quickly toward him with outstretched hand in eager cordiality.

"Well, Martin Peabody! I am glad to see you—after all these years!

The Judge looked up in a startled sort of way, and his face did not at once assume that cheery and enthusiastic expression of joy which always came over it when he came face to face with some one of whom

he was fond. There could be no doubt that he was glad to see her; in fact, more glad than he seemed willing to let her know—a deep and fervent gladness that had become a hunger as the years went on, and his very effort to repress its expression only made it more apparent. He rose to his feet a little slowly, for him, and there was in his manner an embarrassment, an uncertainty, as though he were not quite sure that he was awake and that she was not a vision.

“I’d have known you anywhere,” she went on, as he took her hand. “You haven’t changed at all—gray, of course, but not changed a bit!”

“And I am glad to see you, Agatha,” said the Judge, his eyes devouring her, “and I am truthful in saying that you have changed but little—and that little, I think, for the better!”

“Now, Martin!” said Agatha, as the Judge released her hand. “The very idea! Here I am an old woman—and you saying such things to me! Besides, I have been telling Ruth that I was quite a village belle when I was young, and now what will she think? Ruth,” she said, turning to her daughter, “this is Mr. Peabody—Judge Peabody, I suppose I’ll have to say—I used to know him long ago—all my life!”

Ruth came quickly to the Judge and took his outstretched hand and shook it heartily: “I am so glad to meet you—in the flesh—Judge! And I

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know that we are going to be good pals! I feel that I don't really need an introduction, for Mother has spoken of you very often. It's going to be great fun to meet Mother's friends—people who knew her when she was a girl;" and then she added, mischievously, with something very near a wink at the Judge, "I'm just perfectly certain that I am going to hear a lot of things about her—things that may come in handy to know!"

The Judge was fast becoming himself again; he smiled, and then drew down the corners of his mouth in that peculiar way of his: "Really, Miss Ruth, I don't believe any of your mother's old friends are going to betray her! Your mother was a very charming girl, and I may say—very like you!"

"Isn't he the nicest man—to make such a pretty speech!" exclaimed Ruth, beaming on the Judge, and turning to the befloured Alan for confirmation. "And isn't it just perfectly fine and loyal of him, Mother, to say that he won't give you away!"

"Now, Miss Loring!" protested the Judge, "when I said 'betray,' I didn't mean——"

"Oh, yes you did! That's just exactly what you meant!" said Ruth, with conviction. "You see, Mother——"

"Mrs. Loring, let me present my friend and associate, Mr. Alan Bailey," hastily interrupted the

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Judge, in an effort to stop the irrepressible Ruth. "And Miss Loring, this is Mr. Bailey. He is studying law with me, and I may say, is becoming *particeps criminis* in what goes on in my office. I am quite sure you both will like him."

Alan bowed, and the ladies acknowledged the introduction gracefully. Ruth looked at Alan with a genial smile: "I'm sure I shall," she said with unvarnished frankness, "but even such an interesting digression as Mr. Bailey isn't going to make me forget what I intended to say. You see, Mother says I'm a hoyden and a tom-boy and that I'm 'skittish'—just think, Judge, 'skittish'—and that I didn't get it from her! But I am perfectly convinced that if I am 'skittish,' it is hereditary—from my mother! And I am going to dig into her dark past and get the truth from somebody!"

"Well, of all the impudence! My dark past! Indeed! To think that I should have such an unfilial girl! How sharper than a toothless snake it is to have a serpentine child—or something—I never could get that quite right, though Goodness knows, I have the meaning of it impressed on me every day! Now you just run away and occupy yourself with Mr. Bailey, if he'll let you and hasn't anything better to do, while the Judge and I talk business!" And Agatha waved Ruth and Alan away and sat

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down by the Judge's desk. Thus dismissed, Alan conducted Ruth to the outer office.

For a moment, there was an embarrassed silence between the Judge and Agatha—it is difficult to know just how to begin after a lapse of more than twenty years, especially when relations were such as existed between these two; and, as is usual—and safest—commonplaces are the most available initiative.

"I don't believe I shall ever get used to calling you 'Judge,' Martin," said Agatha, as she fumbled in a handbag, and brought out some papers.

The Judge smiled: "You won't have to," said he. "I'm not really a judge. I never was elected or appointed to any office. That is just a title—almost a nickname—that people bestow upon a lawyer of advancing years—usually when he is not very successful."

"Haven't you been successful, Martin?" she asked, a note of regret and solicitude in her voice.

"No," said the Judge, slowly, "not according to accepted standards. Here I am in a little, country law-office; never have been able to lay up any money—always found uses for more than I could get hold of. And I guess you haven't seen my name in the newspaper headlines very often, have you?"

"I don't know that 'accepted standards' are always very accurate gauges," said Agatha. "Success

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is measured in several ways. Have you been happy—that is the main thing?”

“Reasonably so,” said the Judge, idling with a pen that lay at his hand. “Reasonably so, I guess.” He paused and looked at her just a little reproachfully: “Not so happy as I should have been—under other circumstances.”

Agatha colored, and fumbled aimlessly with the papers. “Maybe it’s just as well not to refer to—things,” she said, not meeting his eye. “Explanations never seem to do a great deal of good, and besides, all that was a very long time ago.”

The Judge looked at her with grave earnestness: “Don’t you think that it was due me to let me make some explanation—at that time—I don’t mean now?” he asked.

Agatha looked up at him quickly, and then dropped her eyes: “Possibly—no doubt it was,” she said, a trifle guiltily. “But—I felt angry—hurt—and I thought—I was a young girl and rashly impulsive—and when you didn’t come for me, as you promised, and didn’t send any word, I threw everything to the winds—I didn’t care what I did!” Agatha paused and looked at the Judge reproachfully. “You know, Martin, that was really the start of it all. You had promised to take me, and I waited and waited; but you didn’t come and you didn’t send any word.”

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"Yes," replied the Judge slowly, "that's all true, Agatha. I guess I was a good deal to blame!"

"Well," Agatha went on, "I suppose you're forgiven now, but I was pretty mad about it then. And when Jimmy Loring drove up to the house and asked me to go to the party with him, I was glad to accept—to get even!" Agatha paused, and opened and shut the handbag with nervous absent-mindedness, while the Judge looked at her solemnly, and twirled the pen. Agatha went on as though in justification:

"At the party, all the girls wanted Jimmy—you know he was the catch of the county—but he danced every dance with me, except the last—he danced that with Lou Dunbar, and I hated her—and I made up my mind I'd show her that I could have him if I wanted him! And when we drove toward home, he asked me to run away with him—to go over to Middletown and be married, right then! He hadn't any more than got the words out of his mouth before we passed you on the road, driving *another girl!* You can't deny that, Martin, can you?"

The Judge fumbled with a pen but made no reply, and Agatha continued: "That settled it, and I agreed to run away with him—for spite! To spite Lou Dunbar and to spite—you!"

Agatha shut the bag with a snap and sat up straight.

"God knows I paid for my impulsiveness—and spite!" she added.

After a moment, she laughed—a little, mirthless laugh—"and I presume you ought to be very glad that you didn't get that kind of a woman for your wife!"

The Judge said nothing, examining the pen intently, much after the manner that Ramsay examined his cigar.

"That was a bad night for the Rutherford family," Agatha continued, with a sigh. "It was that same night that my brother, Billy, got into a drunken row and nearly killed that hop-buyer. Billy ran away after the fight, if you remember, and we never have heard anything of him since."

"Yes," said the Judge, slowly, "I remember."

Agatha pulled herself together, out of the past, with a little sigh, and put a bundle of papers on the table.

"Martin," she said, "I want to talk to you about my property. You know, Mr. Loring, and my father, too, left me quite a little of various kinds, and it is pretty well scattered; and I thought if you could——" Agatha stopped, looking at a very brilliant red blotter that lay before her on the table, and laughed reminiscently. "Martin," she said, in a different tone, "do you remember the time you took me sleigh-riding and we tipped over and the

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horse ran away and we had to walk home—miles? A red sleigh it was—red and green!”

The Judge laughed, or, rather, chuckled: “I should say I did! I had a dreadful time explaining—that was another case where explanations didn’t do much good! You see, I borrowed the horse from old man Pomeroy—he wasn’t any too anxious to let me have it—but I sort of persuaded him; and I ‘borrowed’ the sleigh from Turner, the blacksmith. The sleigh didn’t belong to Turner—he had just repaired and painted it—for Loring—Loring was going to cut a dash with you! The paint wasn’t quite dry,” and the Judge shook as he thought of it: “Do you remember what a bright red it was?”

“Do I remember it?” repeated Agatha, “I most certainly do! And I had an awful time explaining, too! You see, father didn’t know I was going—with you—he had forbidden me to! He knew about it afterwards, though—I had red and green paint all over me!”

“Well,” said the Judge, “Turner didn’t know the sleigh was going, either! You see, I ‘borrowed’ it after dark—after he had gone home to supper! I had asked him about it earlier in the day and he had said, ‘No.’ But he was such a liar that you couldn’t believe anything he said; and when I got to thinking about it, I concluded that he meant, ‘Yes,’ and I

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went and took it. It was so dark that I didn't notice that the paint was wet."

"Father noticed it, the next morning," laughed Agatha. "He was the maddest man I ever saw!"

"Then," said the Judge, shaking his head incredulously, "you didn't see Turner! I used to cross over to the other side of the street every time I saw him coming—for months!" Both Agatha and the Judge laughed happily.

"Dear me!" she exclaimed, "I'm forgetting what I came for. I want to show you these papers—I think you better keep them, for I am forever losing or mislaying them. There are quite a few letters from my attorneys in France"—again Memory took possession of her, and her face broke into a broad smile. "Martin," she almost whispered, "speaking of letters—do you remember the letters you wrote me when I was away at school, that time? You had just begun to study law." The Judge winced, and Agatha, seeing her advantage, laughed, "I'm going to read them to you some day!"

"Now, Agatha," said the Judge, in a tone of alarmed protest, "you don't intend to be mean enough—you don't mean to tell me that you have those letters yet?"

"Certainly, I have!" said Agatha. "I wouldn't part with them for anything! They're wonderful! I know you'll enjoy hearing them!"

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"And you mean to say that you are going to fish out those maudlin effusions from a vanished past and pillory me with them?" asked he, apprehensively.

"Maudlin!" laughed Agatha, "they weren't maudlin, at all! They were perfectly lovely! And, Oh, how you did soar!" and she waved her arm in a lofty and grandiloquent gesture indicative of a prodigious flight of rhetoric.

"Now, Agatha," pleaded the Judge, "I maintain that isn't fair! You wouldn't be mean enough for that?" But Agatha assured him that such was her unalterable intention. The Judge shook his head sagely. "Letters," he said, "are an awful weapon—in the hands of a woman. The old copy-books used to say, 'Do right, and fear no man.' But not so long ago, the defendant in a breach of promise suit said, after the jury had awarded the plaintiff a substantial sum in damages, 'Don't write, and fear no woman!' Please have a little regard for my feelings!"

"Oh, Martin, Martin!" teased Agatha, "wait till you hear them!"

"And you are determined," said the Judge, with a twinkle in his eyes, "you are determined to subject me to this outrage?"

"I wouldn't miss it for worlds!" and she fairly gloated over the prospect.

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"All right, Agatha," said the Judge, resignedly, as he rose and went to the safe, and after considerable fumbling, came back with a packet of faded letters; and, after seating himself comfortably, he began to untie the string that bound them together.

"All right, Agatha! As Easter's Jim says, 'Yo' kin go as fah as yo' like!' I, too, have some letters."

"Now, Martin Peabody!" shrieked Agatha, in horror, "you don't mean to——"

"Oh, yes, I do," said the Judge, firmly. "I have certain correspondence on file that may properly be introduced into these proceed——"

"Martin, if you ever dare! Give me those letters!" and she made a dive for them, but the Judge managed to hold her off, though she still strove to get them away from him until, breathless, she gave up the struggle. "Now, Martin"—it was her turn to plead—"give me those letters!"

"Not for worlds!" laughed the Judge. "I know you'll enjoy hearing them—you did a little soaring, yourself!" and the Judge imitated Agatha's tone and gesture.

"I didn't think any man could be so mean," said Agatha, despairingly.

"Nor I any woman," replied the Judge. "Who started the game, anyway?" For a moment, they looked at each other, and then Agatha turned away blushing. "Suppose," said the Judge, as he leaned

toward her, "that we make a dicker—will you give me back my letters if I give you yours?"

"No," she answered, with spirit, "I shall keep what I have."

"I didn't intend to make the trade myself," said the Judge. "I just wanted to see how you felt about it—though there isn't a great deal left of mine; I suppose I've read them a thousand times!" and the Judge looked at them tenderly.

"Only a thousand? How uncomplimentary!" said Agatha. "Gracious!" she went on, "I remember what a time I had getting your letters. The matron of the school had orders from father to inspect all my mail, and I had to climb out one of the windows and over a high fence and bribe the mail-carrier to give them to me before he got to the school!"

The accusing voice of Ruth spoke from the doorway: "And my mother says I'm skittish!"

Both the Judge and Agatha started guiltily. "Now—ahem—about those mortgages, Agatha," said the Judge, "I shall look them over and——"

Ruth advanced triumphantly: "Oh, indeed! Those mortgages that Mother used to get by scrambling out of a window and over a high fence?"

"Ruth Loring!" said Agatha, with all the severity she could summon, "I never saw such an ill-

bred girl! The idea of you interrupting us when we were talking——”

“Business!” finished Ruth. “Let me see the letters, Judge,” and she advanced toward him coaxingly. “I want to see how Mother used to soar!” and she imitated the Judge’s tone. “Please let me see them!”

“By soaring,” explained the Judge, lamely, “I meant, of course, giving expression to lofty sentiments,” putting the letters behind him.

“No doubt!” said Ruth. “Let me see just how lofty they were!”

“Well, Judge Peabody,” said Agatha, looking at Ruth with as straight a face as she could muster, “as it seems that we are not to be permitted to transact private business without being subject to interruption, I suppose we must postpone our interview until such time and place as to be secure from interruption by my daughter.”

“How about transacting it in a sleigh—a red and green one, that tips over?” suggested Ruth, maliciously.

“Really,” said Agatha, “I was not aware that eavesdropping was one of your accomplishments!”

“We didn’t eavesdrop—did we Mr. Bailey?” calling to Alan, who was still in the outer office. “The door was ajar and we couldn’t help hearing! Neither could a man who is out there with a boy—

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a perfectly official-looking man—like a detective, or something, and a perfectly spirituelle boy—mostly eyes and hair—I'm sure he was shocked when you got to wrestling, or playing tag——”

“Why, you incorrigible child, what do you mean—wrestling or playing tag?” gasped Agatha.

“Well, it sounded like it,” said Ruth, blandly, “and I told Mr. Bailey that I thought I better come in and preserve any shred of reputation that Mother had left.”

“Why, I never heard of anything so atrocious!” protested Agatha.

“Well, the man—the man outside with the boy—he grinned and winked at Mr. Bailey, and said he ‘guessed the Judge must be one gay, old sport—all things considered—and a devil among the dames’—indeed, that’s just what he said—and so I thought it was time to——”

“Well, of all things!” gasped Agatha. “I’ll attend to you, young lady, when I get you home! I never heard anything like it!” And Agatha tugged at her daughter’s arm. “Good morning, Martin, you must come to see us—me, I mean—as soon as you can. Now you come along!” she said to Ruth.

But Ruth hung back; this was too good an opportunity to miss. “Mother, she said, pretending to be greatly distressed, “isn’t there a back way out? I don’t want that man to see you—he looks

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so perfectly official and detective! Can't mother climb out of a window, or something, Judge? She ought to be able after all the practice she's had."

In desperation, Agatha pushed her daughter toward the door. "Good-by, Judge!" laughed Ruth. "I can see that we're going to be perfectly good chums!" Just at that moment Alan entered from the outer room, evidently with a message for the Judge. "Good-by—Alan!" Ruth called to him. "You must come to see us! You may take me riding in a red and green sleigh——" But Agatha had yanked her through the door.

Closely following on Alan's heels, and immediately after the departure of the ladies, a tall man, leading a boy of about ten, entered; and immediately upon seeing the Judge, the boy pulled away from the attendant and ran to the Judge and threw his arms about his neck.

"Oh, I'm so glad you sent for me!" cried the boy happily, but with a touch of reproach in his voice. "You didn't come to see me for such a long time!"

The Judge returned the boy's greeting affectionately: "I know it, I know it!" said the Judge soothingly. "And I should have come down to see you oftener—I meant to and wanted to, you may be sure! But now, you're here for good, and we'll make up for lost time!"

Into the room hurried Agatha, just as the Judge

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released the boy from his embrace. "I forgot my parasol——" she began, and then looked from the boy to the Judge and back again. The Judge found her parasol and handed it to her gallantly.

"You'll 'scuse me, Mr. Peabody," interrupted the man, bowing to Agatha, "but my train for New York leaves in a little while, an' I can't wait no longer or I'll have to stay here till to-morrow. I don't know's there's anything more for me to do 'n to turn your boy over to you an' get a receipt for him."

Agatha stood very still, as though rooted to the spot; and the Judge eyed her keenly for a moment, and then turned to the man: "You must have some sort of papers for me to sign," he said, a little wearily. "Let me have them and then you can get your train." The man handed over some papers, and the Judge affixed his signature at the table and handed them back, keeping several folded sheets that looked like records. "Is there anything for me to pay?"

"No, Mr. Peabody," answered the man, "I guess you settled everything that you owed before I started. I didn't get no orders to collect anythin'."

As the man turned away toward the door, he looked at the boy a little solicitously: "We kep' him as well as we could for you—but he ain't been real first-rate for quite a spell—kind o' thin an' peaked

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—an' I guess you done the right thing in havin' him up here in the country."

"Yes, indeed," said the Judge, as he patted the boy affectionately. "He'll be all right soon! I'll guarantee Easter 'll feed him up and put some flesh on him. He'll be all right!" he repeated, assuringly.

"Well," said the man, "I guess I'll be goin' now. Good-by, Mr. Peabody. Good-by, 321! Be a good boy!"

"Good-by, Mr. Haskins!" said the boy, in a relieved way, and snuggled close to the Judge, who put his arm about the boy's shoulder.

CHAPTER VIII

AND Agatha had heard it all! She stood there, looking from one to the other in a dazed way. Why she had remained, she did not know—but she had; and she realized that it was something of great moment. She had put aside all delicacy—the feeling never occurred to her that she was a witness to something which was entirely a private matter and none of her business. She did not, in some way, feel that she was an intruder. She felt, instinctively, that this was very vital with her.

When the door closed behind the man, she went nearer to the Judge: "Martin," she said, "did I understand that man to say 'your boy?'"

The Judge looked steadily and unflinchingly into her face: "I guess you did, Agatha," he said calmly.

Seating himself, he took the boy on his knee: "You're my boy, all right, aren't you, Son?"

"Yes, Sir," said the boy, looking up at him trustingly.

Agatha stood for a moment; then she lifted her head high, and sailed out of the room, slamming the door.

For a moment, neither the Judge nor the boy

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spoke. The latter looked up into the Judge's face, but could get no information from that usually expressive countenance, and the slam that Agatha had given the door still sounded in his ears.

"I guess that lady didn't like me pretty well?" he said, timidly. The Judge roused himself: "Not a bit of it, Son—that wasn't it, at all. She likes you, all right—it's just something you don't understand."

The Judge thought a moment and then he asked, "Now, tell me, Son—what is your name?"

"Three-twenty-one," answered the boy, quickly; and then, just as quickly, he said, "But sometimes, some of them—you—call me 'John.' "

"'John' what?" asked the Judge.

"Just 'John' "—he hesitated—"they never said anything else but 'John'," answered the boy in a frank, but slightly puzzled way, as though he were doing the best he could, but felt that he wasn't doing very well.

"All right," said the Judge, assuringly, and in a way that showed that the examination was over; "from now on, your name is going to be 'John Peabody.' When folks ask you your name you tell them it's 'John Peabody.' "

"Yes, Sir," said the boy.

"Now—let's hear you say it. What's your name, Son?"

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"John Peabody, Sir."

"Good!" said the Judge. "Now——"

Easter's black face appeared in the window: "Look yah, Jedge," she said reproachfully, "huccum yo' ain't home to yo' dinnah? Done had 'er ready mos' a houah! Hit's all gittin' col'."

"All right, Easter, we'll be right along—be right along!" Then he held the boy off at arms' length and looked into his frank eyes for a moment and then said, pulling down the corners of his mouth in that quizzical smile of his, "John Peabody, do you think you could manage to eat a little something?—kind o' worry down a few morsels?"

"Yes, Sir—I think I could," said John in a way that could have left no doubt in any one's mind.

"Do you like corn-muffins and butter and honey and raspberry-jam and preserved peaches and such?" questioned the Judge.

"I think so," said the boy. "I don't believe I ever tasted all of those things, but I guess I like 'em."

"And fried chicken and baked sweet-potatoes and green corn and apple pie—'knee-deep,'"—the Judge indicated the depth of the pie by holding his hands about six inches apart—"with sugar and cream on it, and a few glasses of nice, cold, fresh milk? And mebbe a couple of pieces of chocolate-cake to top off with?"

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"Yes, *Sir!*" said John, with enthusiasm, slightly tempered by the fear that this gastronomic orgy might turn out to be a mirage as he approached it.

"Yo' done ferget de rice-puddin', Jaidge!" grinned Easter from the window.

"So I did!" admitted the Judge, as though he had made a serious omission. "Do you think you could manage that, too?"

"I could try," said the boy, taking a long breath.

"All right!" said the Judge, as he reached for his hat, "John Peabody, let's go home!"

The greater part of the ride home from the village in the Loring car was in silence. Ruth made one or two attempts to draw her mother out, but they were almost entirely unsuccessful; and to Ruth's questions, if Agatha answered at all, it was in monosyllables. Even an occasional burst of speed, or the taking of a sharp corner on two wheels—a situation that would ordinarily have brought a frantic squeak of protest from Agatha—did not rouse her from her lethargy. Ruth was plainly concerned, and saw that more than ordinary skill would have to be employed to get her mother to talk.

"Where do you suppose it has gone?" asked Ruth, as she stopped the car with a jerk.

"Where has what gone?" asked her mother, as

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she readjusted herself to the seat. "What do you mean?"

"The hearse," said Ruth. "It must have gotten away from us, somehow!"

"Will you tell me what on earth you are talking about?" asked Agatha, in bewilderment. "I don't know anything about a hearse!"

"Well, there must be one, somewhere," said Ruth. "You couldn't possibly look as glum as you do unless you were at a funeral!"

"Don't be silly!" said Agatha, "and please drive home."

"Wouldn't it cheer you up a bit if I ran over a chicken for you—or a cow or something?" asked Ruth. "Maybe, if you look those newspapers over, you'll find some hilariously jolly detailed accounts of the recent Armenian massacres—that would be positively funny to any one who feels as blue as you look!"

Agatha sniffed, but did not answer, and Ruth turned around and put her hand affectionately upon her mother's knee: "Agatha," she said, with playful reproach, "what on earth did that Judge person do or say to you when you went back for your parasol? It must have been something awful, for you went in as gay as a flag, and came out looking like the orphan child that Santa Claus forgot."

"You never mind about the Judge person or the

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orphan child!" sniffed Agatha. "You just get me home as quickly as you can—no, no! I don't mean that, either! I mean just drive me home."

Ruth looked at her mother for a moment, and then started the car. "Of course," she said, "if you want to suffer alone with your secret sorrow, I can't help it—that's a luxury any woman is entitled to. I'd like to see any well-meaning person come around and try to stop me suffering when I want to suffer! I would give her the gate, as Dicky Whittlesey says. But I can't understand it. Now, I thought the Judge was too perfectly lovely for words—that official-looking man said he guessed he was 'some gay, old sport, and a——' "

"I do wish you'd stop that incessant chatter, Ruth, and get me home," said her mother, with a decided note of impatience in her voice.

After the car had sped along for a distance, Ruth asked, "Did you notice what a nice looking boy that detective man had with him, Mother?"

Agatha did not answer. "Who was he, do you suppose?" persisted Ruth.

Again no answer. Ruth looked around at her mother for a second; Mrs. Loring's face was set hard, and she looked straight ahead, with eyes that saw nothing.

"Giddap!" said Ruth, as she "stepped on the gas."

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John Peabody and the Judge walked along the street, hand in hand, followed by the baldly curious looks of such members of the population as were abroad at the noon hour. Several of "the sitters over to Bradley's" had not yet gone home "t' see what the ol' woman hed fer dinner"—their entire connection with any meal being to eat it—and the advent of any stranger in town was sufficient to arouse them from their more or less somnolent condition. And although the Judge passed directly in front of them and nodded a perfunctory acknowledgment of their greeting, he did not pause to enlighten them as to the identity of his companion, and various speculations were advanced as to who the boy might be.

"Reckon the' wa'n't 'nuff boys in town, so th' Jedge sent some place an' hed one brung here so 's he cud hev a playmate," said Eb Timmons, as he resumed his normal posture against the wall of Bradley's store, after almost dislocating his neck craning it after the receding pair.

"I seen a big man—looked like an ofricer—bring-in' the kid up from th' depo'," said Syl Larrabee, who attended to everybody's business but his own. "I ast him, civil like, ef he hed some business 'ith somebuddy in taown, seein' he was a stranger, but he never made me no answer. Looks t' me 's tho'

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the' 's so'thin' mighty mysterious 'bout the hull shootin'-match!"

"Strange th' Jedge didn't say nuthin' to me 'bout it when I was in t' see him this mornin'," chimed in Abner Judd, who had, by this time, completed his newspaper and tobacco routes, and had resumed his seat in "parliament." "Th' Jedge wanted some confidential business done, an' he paid me t' do it fer him—seems he owed Mis' Simpson some money an' I guess she cum 'round t' c'lect it an' he didn't hev it. An' soon 's he scraped it up, he asked me t' settle up with her—looked like he didn't want t' face her himself, an' I done it fer him. Yo' kin betcher life he gimme my price, though! I ain't no cheap skate, when 't comes to them things!"

"Whut did he owe Mis' Simpson fer?" asked Eb.

"I dunno, an' ef I did, I couldn't tell ye—I said th' business was confidential, didn't I?" said Abner, virtuously, and with the air of a man who could tell a lot about it, if he only would.

"'T ain't likely it hed nuthin' t' do with this here boy, is it?" asked Larrabee, winking knowingly at Abner.

"Yo' kin search me, an' then yo' won't git no information," said Abner, with the air of one who has a dark secret buried in his bosom from which wild horses could not drag it forth. "I ain't sayin' nuthin'!" And Abner, feeling that he had become a

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person of enough importance to be talked about in his absence, rose and started toward his home on the slim chance that Snootey had caught another big trout. Besides, he wanted to interview that young man in regard "to blabbin' things all over taown."

"What did I tell ye?" asked Syl Larrabee, with an ominous shake of the head. "I knowed there was some nigger in th' wood-pile th' min'ite I seen Mis' Simpson go inta Peabody's awfiss, an' 'n this boy come along!"

"I allus said ol' Peabody was sly 's they make 'em!" said Eb. "The' was Mis' Lorin' an' her daughter, too, was inta his awfiss to-day—yo' all see 'em, same 's I did! Come honkin' up in a red ortermobile, th' gal drivin', same 's a man! Some goin's on, I call it!"

"Yaas, an' Jim Ramsay, he was in there, too! An' he cum out madder 'n a wet hen," said Sylvester. "Th' Jedge musta had a busy day!"

"Looks like the whole pack 'n passel 'll bear watchin'," said Eb, with another wise and ominous shake of his head. "Guess I'll go down street an' see what th' ol' woman's got fer dinner. Comin' along my way?"

"No," said Sylvester, "I reckon I ain't hankerin' fer nuthin' t' eat—not to speak of. I guess I'll jes' set here an' see what comes off."

CHAPTER IX

At the Judge's home, John Peabody was getting a taste of what a real home is like. In the big, cool dining-room, with its broad windows shaded by honey-suckle vines and tall sun-flowers, he and the Judge looked at each other across the white tablecloth whereon were the remains of the feast. The culinary promise had been fulfilled—had materialized into an actuality, even down to the smallest detail, with one or two extras thrown in for good measure. And bravely had John Peabody lived up to his promise "to try." That one small stomach couldn't hold any more, was not his fault. And although Easter Sunday stood beside him and tried to tempt him with "jes' one mo' li'l chunk o' cake," the boy threw up his hands in unconditional surrender.

"Law, Jaidge," said the grinning Easter, "de chile 's done stuffed!"

"He's making up for lost time, and he has considerable distance to travel," said the Judge. "Sure you can't go one more piece of pie or something?" said he, coaxingly, "Just a *little* something to toe-out with?"

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"No, Sir," said John hopelessly and apologetically, and gasping for breath, "I really can't! I'm mighty sorry, but I guess I've had all I can hold."

"Well," said the Judge, with an air of satisfaction, "if that's the case, I suppose we may as well get down to business. Has Jim finished his dinner, Easter? If he has send him out to us—we'll be on the side porch. Don't hurry him, if he hasn't finished."

"Law, Jaidge," said Easter, "seem lik' dat triflin' li'l stick o' lickerish he ain't nevah gwine finish, 'less'n I takes him by de yars an' drag 'im 'way f'um de table! Dat boy he founder hisself someday, jes' lik' a hawse gittin' in a oat-bin! Das a fac'!"

"Well, I guess I'd give him all he wants, Easter," said the Judge; "he's growing, you know, and a growing boy needs a lot."

"Who? Him?" said Easter, contemptuously, "Dat li'l shrimp ain't growed no way, 'cept sassy! Da's all—he done growed sassy, shu' 'nuff! Yis-tiddy, he done e't up ever'thin' in de house an' hol-lah fo' mo'. An' I says, to 'im, I says, 'Look yah, yo' wuff'less, li'l scoun'rel, whar yo' 'spec' de Jaidge gwine get off wid dis heah high cos' o' livin' an' yo' eatin' yo' haid off lik' yo' does?' An' whut yo' s'pose he gimme back? 'You should worry!' he says. Jes' lik' dat. 'You sh'd worry!' 'Fo' Gawd, Jaidge, I haul off mah han' and fotch a lick at 'im

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an' bust mah fis' 'gin de do', when he duck!" And Easter exhibited an obviously swollen paw that bore evidence of the truth of her statement that Jim had "ducked."

Certain sounds that proceeded from the kitchen indicated that Jim was preparing to "duck" again, if necessary. Easter lumbered out to forestall his escape, but was manifestly a little late, judging from the conversation that ensued; but she called after Jim, telling him, among other things, that the Judge wanted to see him.

"Well, John," said the Judge, after they had seated themselves on the side porch, and the Judge had filled and lit his pipe, "do you reckon you're going to like it well enough here to stay a spell—to call this home?"

The boy looked up at the Judge and a pathetic smile came over his pinched face; his frank eyes met those of the man, and he said, "I didn't s'pose there was any place as nice as this in the whole world!"

"Well, that's what I'd call a pretty fair endorsement!" said the Judge. "I reckon Spring Valley 'll be all swelled up, when it knows about it!"

"I didn't mean Spring Valley," answered the boy, quickly, "I meant here—your home!"

"*Our* home, John," corrected the Judge; "*Our*

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home! I want you to feel that this is *your* home—if you think you c'n stand it."

John looked at the man, and there were signs of tears in his eyes—happy tears, and it was a moment or two before he could speak: "And what do you want me to do? There must be something that I can do to help—to pay you for taking care of me." John had not been accustomed to getting something for nothing—he had been "No. 321," until to-day.

"Yes, Sir!" said the Judge, with emphasis, "There's a lot you can do! The fact is, I've laid out quite considerable of a schedule for you, and I want you to follow it. No shirking, or anything like that!"

"I won't," said the boy, eagerly. "You tell me what you want me to do, and I'll do it—if you'll only keep me here!"

"All right!" said the Judge. "That's a bargain!" And he laid his pipe on the floor, put his elbows on his knees, and started to check off the various requirements on his fingers, and John listened attentively. "The first thing is, you must get up at seven o'clock in the morning—unless you want to stay in bed a little longer—and then you're to eat a good breakfast—eat a lot, mind you—no nibblin'!" John smiled and nodded. "Then," continued the Judge, "you've got to get out with Fatty and Snootey and Jim and the rest of the pirate crew—or by your-

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self, if you prefer it—and play ball or go swimming or fishing or something like that until it's time for dinner and be sure to bring a good appetite with you."

"I don't believe I'm ever going to want anything more to eat!" said John, smiling and taking a long breath.

"Well, I think, mebbe, in the course o' time, you'll probably want a snack of something," said the Judge, laughing. "That's the way it is with boys, usually. And now to get back to your duties—after dinner, you've got to get out and repeat the morning's work, with such variations as the gang decides upon. After supper, you can sit out here with me, for a spell, unless there's something else you want to do—and into bed at nine o'clock, or mebbe a little earlier or later, as the case may be. Do you think you can conform to those regulations, for a spell, this summer? Won't feel called on to pass resolutions and strike, will you?"

John looked at the Judge and smiled in an old and appreciative way: "I should think 'most any boy could follow those rules!" he said. "But when—don't I have any work to do? I can wash dishes and windows and scrub floors and carry up coal and run errands and things like that, and I guess I could learn to weed the garden, or something. I'm a good

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worker—Mr. Haskins said I was as good a worker as any boy in The Asylum!”

“Work!” said the Judge. “You bet you’ve got to work! Your job is to go out and collect one million freckles on your face and hands—I’m goin’ to count ’em to see if you get ’em all—and to put ten pounds of solid flesh on your bones! And I guess that ’ll keep you some busy! When you’ve done that, it ’ll be time enough to talk about what else there is for you to do!”

While John was thinking this over, Jim appeared, and stood, leaning against one of the posts of the porch, and grinning, but keeping one eye peeled in the direction of the front door, as though apprehensive of an attack by the enemy from that quarter.

“Mammy done says yo’ all wants me,” he ventured.

“Jim,” said the Judge, “this boy is John Peabody; he’s going to live here with us, and I want you two to be friends.” Both boys grinned, and Jim dug his big toe into the ground bashfully. “Now, what I want to know is,” continued the Judge, “do you think you can manage to get ‘the gang’ together this afternoon and bring them here—Fatty and Snootey and the rest?”

“Yassah! Ah reckon Ah kin, ’less ’n Fatty’s maw got ’im locked in de house ’count o’ him tryin’ t’ see ef he c’d run Mistah Belchah’s flivvah.”

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"You don't mean to say that Fatty got in Belcher's car and tried to run it?" asked the Judge, in dismay.

"Yassah," said Jim, "an' he run 'er, shu' 'nuff—me an' Snootey was in de flivvah, too. Yassah, ol' Fatty he kin run 'er swell—'cept he didn' 'low fo' a tree. She hit dat tree kerplop! Oh, boy! Yassah! We all done got th'owed out!"

"Anybody hurt?" asked the Judge, anxiously. "Nossah—'ceptin' Fatty done got his nose skint 'gin de tree."

"Well, was the car damaged much?" asked the Judge.

"Nossah, Ah don' reckon so—jes' de front end squshed up a li'l, an' glass broke. We all didn' stop—we jes beat it, 'count o' Mistah Belcher comin'. He was mad—done make a tur'ble hollah an' cuss us out propah!"

"Well, I don't know as you could blame him much," said the Judge, reflectively. "Just the front end squshed up a little and the glass broken, eh?"

"Yassah—da's all—'cept de mud-guards was squshed some."

"My, my! The mud-guards, too! And you think that mebbe Fatty can't get out to-day? If that's the case, I'll have to go and intercede for him. I——"

At that precise moment, Fatty strolled up to the

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gate, and leaning over it, proceeded to eat an apple with extreme nonchalance. The Judge called to him, and as Fatty opened the gate, Snootey came on the run from the other direction, and the boys joined the party on the side porch. John was properly introduced and tentatively accepted into membership—"any friend of the Judge's must be all right!"

"What about the automobile accident, Fatty?" asked the Judge. "I understand you'd be quite a chauffeur except for trees getting in the way."

"I didn't do nuthin', Judge!" protested Fatty. "I seen Miss Loring drive up in her car to your awfiss, an it looked mighty easy. She jes come up kerswish!" and Fatty imitated the dashing way in which Ruth handled her car. "An' Ol' Man Belcher's Tin-Lizzie was settin' out in front o' the bank——"

"Tin-Lizzie?" queried the Judge, "I don't believe I know what a 'Tin-Lizzie' is."

"Why, a Tin-Lizzie 's a 'flivver'—'a Henery'—'a road-louse'—tha's what ever'body calls 'em. Well, Mel Birkett giv' me a ride in his'n, one day, an' I watched how he done it. An' when I seen Ol' Man Belcher's settin' there—he wouldn't lemme ride in 'er, one day, when I ast him—I says, 'Here's where I git a ride;' an' me an' Snootey an' Jim got in 'er an' I let 'er go."

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"Yassah!" corroborated Jim, "Da's de Gawd's truf—da's all we done."

"An' I c'd 'a' got away with it, too—'f it had'n' o' bin fer that ol' tree! Don't look to me like that tree's got a right t' be out there where the road forks, anyhow!" And, after a moment's reflection, Fatty added: "An' I'll bet I c'd 'a' drove a reg'ler car—like Miss Loring's."

"Mebbe the tree is in an awkward place," said the Judge. "But how does the case stand now?"

"I'm s'posed to be locked up," said Fatty, grinning. "I wouldn' 'a' went home, only I was took—Peel Brackett grabbed me an' took me home, an' Maw said she 'd keep me locked in th' house, 'f he didn't sling me into the caboose."

"Do you mean to say that the constable, Peel Brackett, wanted to put you into the lock-up?" asked the Judge, much astonished.

"Sure!" said Fatty, "I bit him when he grabbed me, an' I guess that made him sore. An' then Ol' Man Belcher come an' put up a nawful holler. Maw said Paw was away 't th' caounty seat, an' he'd settle when he come back, but Ol' Man Belcher was all het up an' took on sumpin' scan'lus—said I was a 'meniss,' er sumpin'. Maw had a tough time talkin' him an' Peel Brackett out of it. I wouldn' o' cared 'f they did put me in the jug—I was in there once—that time the barber-shop ketched

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fire—you 'member, Judge—you got me out. 'T ain't bad in there 'cept it don't smell good."

The entire company sat for a moment, thinking the situation over. At length, Fatty broke the silence with a laugh, and his fat sides shook:

"Maw locked me up in her room!" he said, "but I clim' down the water-pipe. It was a cinch! The water-pipe 's broke—reckon I was too heavy, mebbe. They don't make them pipes very strong."

The Judge concealed a smile behind his hand: "Well, well," he said, assuringly, "I'll have to see what I can do to fix matters up."

"You'll have to go some, Judge," said Fatty dubiously, as he felt of the seat of his trousers in an apprehensive way, "fer I kin see, right now, that Paw's gonna raise ned!"

CHAPTER X

AFTER considerable effort, the Judge finally did manage to arrange matters, as he had promised; but, as Fatty intimated, he "had to go some." Fatty's Pa was inclined to follow out the course that the boy had predicted, but the Judge came to the rescue before the "raising" had gone very far or high. The damage amounted to twenty-two dollars—not including the repairs to the water-pipe that "wasn't very strong"—and this the Judge agreed to pay, allowing Fatty "to work it out" in any way that young man saw fit. And while Fatty—or the Judge, either, for that matter—had no definite idea of how this was going to be done, yet, as the Judge said, "You never can tell about those things. I wouldn't be at all surprised if Fatty squared the account—in fact, I'm sure he will! I've risked more than that amount on a boy before, and I don't know as I'm out—much—all things considered."

The "squaring" of Belcher, however, was another matter. He was ready enough to take the money to repair the car and thus settle the civil suit that he threatened to bring against Fatty's father, but the criminal action was something different. The

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law provided that the taking of an automobile by a person not the owner, even for so innocent a "joy-ride" as that contemplated by the boys, constituted the crime of grand larceny. Mr. Joe Belcher, president of the bank, pillar of the church, etc., etc., was one of those persons that infest every community who want to see all laws enforced—*provided* the enforcement is directed at some one else. 'He felt it to be his duty to society' to press the charge against Fatty, who, it will be remembered, did not occupy an especially enviable position among the residents of Spring Valley. Mr. Belcher took high moral grounds on all matters of public welfare, and he was very much inclined to go before the Grand Jury and procure an indictment, deeming it 'to be his duty as a citizen.' But Mr. Jim Ramsay got wind of the affair; and, knowing the Judge's devotion to "his boys," Ramsay hastened down to Spring Valley, believing that the situation might provide a means to clear away the objections that the Judge held toward a certain project in which he and Belcher were both interested.

And so, when the Judge came to the bank to see Belcher about "letting up" on Fatty, Ramsay was already there and had acquainted Belcher with his plan, which the latter was not slow to adopt.

The Judge was compelled to cool his heels in the main office of the bank for some time before

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he was admitted to the private office; and although he did not show it, his temper was not exactly improved by this discourtesy. When he was finally admitted, he nodded curtly to Belcher and Ramsay, laid his hat on the table, sat on the edge of his chair, and looked from one to the other, for a time, without speaking.

“Belcher,” he began, in a not unpleasant tone, “were you ever a boy?”

The bank-president put up a protesting hand that was intended to wave away all that sort of thing: “I s’pose, Peabody, you’ve come to me to get me to let up on that young scalawag that stole and ruined my car, and I’ll tell you, right from the jump, I’m not goin’ to do it. He’s the worst boy in this town—and that’s sayin’ a good deal—and it’s my duty as a citizen to see that the law is enforced—my duty to society. I’d like to do you a favor, and all that, but in this case I don’t see how I can. Besides, it would be compounding a felony for me to stop now.” Having dropped this bomb in the camp of the Judge, Belcher settled back in his chair to watch its effect, and put his feet up onto the desk.

“All right,” said the Judge, as he rose and reached for his hat, “if that’s the way you feel, I guess there isn’t anything more for me to say—just now, any-

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way," and the Judge started for the door. Ramsay nudged Belcher violently.

"Well, wait a minute," said Belcher, plainly unprepared for this move on the part of the Judge. The latter paused, his hand upon the door-knob.

"What for?" he asked. "That's the only matter I came to see you about."

"Possibly, Mr. Belcher feels that he might make some concessions," broke in Ramsay. "Put in a plea for leniency, may be, or something like that—of course, I don't know."

"Well, yes," said Belcher, lamely, "I thought, mebbe, we could talk the matter over, or, er——"

"What you just said didn't give me much of an idea that you wanted to talk anything over," said the Judge, his hand still on the knob of the door; "you were pretty decided about your duty as a citizen and didn't want to compound a felony. What is there to talk over?"

"I don't suppose Belcher wants to be hard on the boy," said Ramsay, soothingly. "I think he feels that some arrangement could be made—he as good as said he would like to do you a favor."

"Sure, I would," said Belcher, "I don't want to be hard on the boy, an' I s'pose we might come to some arrangement."

"I don't know what arrangement the boy can make—more than he has," said the Judge, returning

to his chair slowly. "Do you mean that you want more money for holding off?"

"Look here, Peabody, that's an insult!" said Belcher, bristling. "You know I can't be bribed!"

"Well, Belcher, just what *do* you mean?" asked the Judge. "What do you mean by 'arrangement'?"

"Well—I mean—mebbe we could come to some—er—understanding—sort o' get together an'——"

Ramsay saw that he would have to take the matter off the hands of the floundering Belcher, and he came to the point quickly: "Judge," he said, in a professionally low tone, "there isn't any good reason why you shouldn't pull *with* us instead of *against* us in a lot of things—you know mighty well it would often be to your advantage. Everybody has to give and take in this world—make concessions—reciprocity—that's the word. Now, here's Belcher willing to do most anything you want in this matter—he knows you're fond of this boy——"

"Wait a minute," said the Judge, rising and coming a little nearer to Ramsay and Belcher, "it isn't necessary for you to go any further—you don't have to go all through with the humiliating things you were going to say. Of course, I knew exactly what you two wanted, the minute you called me back; but I thought I'd see if you'd—I knew Belcher wouldn't—have the nerve to put it up to me, point blank and unvarnished, and I reckon you have! I

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asked Belcher, when I first came in, if he'd ever been a boy—I thought I'd see if he thought he ever had been one. He was *young*, one time, but he wasn't any 'boy.' I know, for I was a boy at that time, myself. He never had the first feelings or instincts of a real boy! He was a mean, cruel, snivelin', lyin', tittle-tattlin', snitchin' cheat an' no-good four-flush—just the same 's he is today!

“Oh, you needn't make any bluff—you ain't goin' to come at me! You're the same cowardly skunk that you were when you were young,” the Judge said to Belcher, as the latter started as though to get out of his chair belligerently. “You wouldn't fight then, and you won't now! You're goin' to sit right there and hear what I've got to say to you—I've had it on my mind for several years, and now you're goin' to hear it—and so's Ramsay!”

The Judge advanced a step or two nearer Belcher, who cowered in his chair, his face the color of chalk.

“I've known you, Joe Belcher, for forty years, and you haven't changed one particle. You never had a single drop of the milk of human kindness in you, and you never will have. You've always thrived on the misfortunes of others and the thought of anybody being happy and prosperous makes you sick. When you were little, it tickled you most to death to see a dumb animal suffer, and you bullied and abused any kid that was smaller and weaker

than you. There wasn't a boy in the village who didn't want to lick you—and did—nor a dog that wouldn't have been glad to bite you. And the boys and men and dogs feel just the same about you to-day. The only reason that you ever got by was because you had a little money—which your father left you; and he must have been almighty fond of children, or he never would have let you grow up!"

The Judge came a step nearer and raised an accusing finger, while Belcher sank deeper into his chair. Ramsay shifted his cigar nervously.

"And you talk about wanting the law enforced, eh? *You!*" and the Judge raised his voice so that Ramsay shut the window nearest him. "Where do you think you'd be if it were? There isn't a day goes by that you don't violate the law right here in this bank. Sing Sing and Dannemora are full of better men than you ever dared to be! And you want to put this ten-year-old boy in jail, eh? It's your duty as a citizen, is it? You and Duty never were on speakin' terms! There isn't one ounce of sincerity in your whole carcass! You're as two-faced as the Jack of Clubs—one of the kind of men that's an enemy of whiskey in public, and a good friend of it in private! You pass the plate and sing loud on Sunday, and you'll skin the eye-teeth out of a blind widow all the rest of the week—and you run on that schedule right along, summer an' win-

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ter. And I s'pose you think that because nobody has ever called your hand, that you can get away with it when you stack up against me. *You can't!* I'll show you up, good and proper! I've got a few cards up my sleeve that I haven't played, and I know a few tricks that the school you went to didn't have in the curriculum!"

The Judge dropped his voice, but there was that in it that cut like a chisel.

"You were a lot insulted, a moment ago, when I asked you if you wanted more money, weren't you?" he said, with scathing contempt. "You couldn't be bribed! You had your duty to perform as a citizen! Huh! You were willin' to forget your duty as a citizen if you could switch me over to your side in this trolley swindle, weren't you? Your duty didn't loom up so all-fired big then, did it? You thought you could use my affection for this boy as a lever to pry me over to your rotten scheme, didn't you?"

"Hold on a minute, Judge," said Ramsay, "you know Belcher can still put that kid of yours away! You ain't doin' the boy much good by what you're saying."

"He can, can he? You think he can put the boy away, do you?" shouted the Judge. "Well, let him go ahead and see whether he can! And I'll promise you one thing, if he *does* send the boy up—and there ain't one chance in a million he can—the boy won't

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go *alone*! Do you think I'm not onto Mr. Joe Belcher's curves? Do you think, Jim Ramsay, that I've been so sound asleep that I don't know of a few of his little transactions? How much do you think he'd like to have the searchlight turned onto the last two or three bank statements that he's put out over his sworn signature? Perjury is quite a serious matter—if it's discovered! How much air do you think several of his little speculations would stand—speculations in which this sure-thing-gambler played the bank's money if he lost, and his own money if he won? There's a few cute, little dummy loans that he made to himself——"

"It's a lie!" said Belcher, weakly.

"Is it?" asked the Judge, hotly; "*I'm* willin' to let the District Attorney decide whether it is or not! Are *you*, Belcher—we'll go right up to the county-seat *now*! If it's a lie, you got an almighty hot come-back at me—Ramsay, here, is a witness!"

The Judge waited, but Belcher said nothing, and Ramsay looked from one to the other. "Who do you think looks the most like a liar, Ramsay—him or me?" asked the Judge, regardless of his Lindley Murray.

Ramsay spat out the stump of his cigar contemptuously; he probably was not greatly shocked morally at Belcher's derelictions, but he loathed a man who couldn't cover his tracks any better than

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Belcher had. "I tell you, boys," he said, in a conciliatory way, "I'd let the whole thing drop, if I was you. After all, it isn't anything to get all het up over. The prank of a mischievous boy isn't worth making all this fuss over. You better forget it, Belcher—if you'll take my advice."

"And that's the best advice you ever gave him!" said the Judge. "*He* was doin' all the talkin' about his duty as a citizen and wantin' the laws enforced—not I." The Judge picked up his hat and walked toward the door; then he turned and came back and asked, "Am I to consider the matter as closed—remember, I'm not asking any favors—either for the boy or myself?"

"Yes," said Ramsay, when it became evident that Belcher had nothing to say, "I guess it's closed, Judge! Closed tight!"

After the door had closed behind the Judge, Belcher revived from his state of semi-collapse. Opening a drawer, he took out a black bottle and a glass, and poured out a generous drink and swallowed it.

Ramsay looked at him pityingly: "It didn't work very well, did it?" he said, studying the end of his cigar.

Belcher looked to be on the verge of apoplexy. "What do you think of that damned old fool?" he said, bitterly.

"I think," said Ramsay, as he adjusted his hat

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with precision and lit a fresh cigar, "that mebbe he isn't quite so much of a damn fool as most people suppose."

Ramsay was passing the Judge's office, on his way to the train, when the Judge came out. "Judge," he said, "would you mind telling me how you came to know all those things about Belcher?"

The Judge smiled his rare, quizzical smile, pulling down the corners of his mouth: "I didn't," he said. "I just took a chance. You may remember that Steve Brodie took a chance!"

Ramsay took his cigar out of his mouth and looked at the Judge. "Well, I'm——!" he said.

CHAPTER XI

SEVERAL weeks had passed since the visit of Mrs. Loring and her daughter to the Judge's office, and although Ruth had made several references to it, she was met with short answers, and the subject was not encouraged. It was decidedly manifest that the Judge was *persona non grata* with Agatha, and although Ruth was at a loss to account for this state of affairs, she made no direct inquiries, after the rebuff she had received in the car. It was plain, too, that Agatha was most unhappy over something connected with her return to the office; but Ruth considered it to be the wisest plan to let the matter, if possible, adjust itself.

But as the days went by, and there seemed to be little chance of this, she resolved to bring up the matter in as subtle a way as possible, and see if her mother would not shed a little light upon it. She regarded both the Judge and Alan Bailey as too valuable additions to their limited social acquaintances in Spring Valley to be ostracised for no apparent good reason, and she did not intend that this should be done without an effort on her part to prevent it.

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"Agatha," said Ruth to her mother, one morning, as they sat on the veranda, "isn't it about time that you went down to the village to see how that perfectly dear Judge is getting on managing your affairs?"

"The 'perfectly dear Judge,' as you call him, is not managing my affairs," said Agatha, stiffly.

"I mean, of course, your *business* affairs," said Ruth, slyly. "It is quite easy to perceive with the naked eye that you are miffed at him about something. But it is unwise to let a lovers' quarrel interfere in matters of bus——"

"Ruth Loring, will you stop talking such nonsense?" snapped her mother, testily. "Lovers' quarrel, indeed! I have decided not to place my affairs—business or otherwise—in his hands."

"Oh," said Ruth, "I thought I understood him to say something about 'looking over these mortgages'—just before we came away from his office. He was just spoofing, then? Sort of stalling—camouflaging—covering up? He didn't have any mortgages to examine? Is that it?"

"I am not accountable for what he said," answered Agatha, plainly annoyed, "and you will oblige me by not making Mr. Peabody a subject of discussion between us."

"You used to talk about him a lot," ventured Ruth, grinning.

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"You are so prone to exaggeration, Ruth, that I am worried about you," said her mother, severely. "Besides, if I did happen to mention him occasionally, I prefer not to talk about him now!"

"Oh, very well!" yawned Ruth. "He always speaks very highly of you," she added, as she picked up a book and pretended to become absorbed in it.

Mrs. Loring looked quickly at her daughter, laid her sewing in her lap, and bit her lip. Ruth did not look up from the page. "What do you mean—'he always speaks very highly of me?' How do you know he does?" Agatha asked, after a pause.

"I heard him," answered Ruth, not greatly interested.

"Indeed!" said Agatha, "And may I ask when and where?"

"The day I took him for a drive in the car," said Ruth, calmly, continuing her reading, and turning a page in the book.

"How delightful!" said Agatha. "That is indeed news to me! What was the occasion for taking him riding in the car? Where did you go—if I may be permitted to ask?"

"Oh, we just drove around—just sort of a mild joy-ride," said Ruth, not looking up. "We got quite chummy," she added, after a pause.

"And when was this?" asked Agatha, tapping her foot.

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"I think it was the day after Alan was here—the first time he was here—if I'm not mistaken. Alan told me that the Judge says lots of nice things about you, too." And Ruth turned another page, as though the conversation were most commonplace.

"Alan?" gasped Agatha. "And pray, who is Alan?"

"Alan?—— Why, Alan Bailey, of course—the young man who is studying law in the Judge's office and clerking in Bradley's store. Don't you recall that the Judge introduced him to us?"

"Ah! Yes, now I remember—the young man with flour on his clothes," said Mrs. Loring, as one having but a very dim recollection of a most unimportant thing. "You speak of him—and I presume to him—as 'Alan,' now, do you?" she asked, with lifted eyebrows, and endeavoring to appear calm, though she seethed within.

"Oh, yes, we're getting to be perfectly good chums, too!" said Ruth, manifesting a little enthusiasm. "He's a dear!"

"How interesting!" exclaimed Agatha. "And I suppose he addresses you as 'Ruth,' does he not?"

"Not yet," answered that young lady, though her manner and tone left no room for doubt that she fully expected such to be the case very soon. Agatha said nothing for a time, but looked at Ruth cov-

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ertly, though that young woman continued to read with sublime unconsciousness.

"And you say that he has been here—more than once, I think you intimated—a social call?" asked Agatha, with as much calmness as she could muster.

"Not entirely," said Ruth, yawning, "but it really developed into that. He came to deliver some flour and groceries from Bradley's store. It was on the day you went to Vernon to see Aunt Sarah. I invited him to call some evening," and Ruth buried herself in her book.

Mrs. Loring looked at her daughter with amazement and pity on her face. "Do you suppose," she asked, witheringly, "that he will come to the front door, or to the back door as is usual with him?"

"I imagine," said Ruth, entirely unruffled, "that he will use the door that is suited to the occasion—back door for groceries, front door for calls. He is not a hick."

"'A hick?'" gasped Agatha, laying down her sewing and looking at her daughter in dismay, "Will you kindly inform me what 'a hick' is?"

"According to Dicky Whittlesey," said Ruth, with a show of being mildly surprised at such parental ignorance, "'a hick' is an untutored rural person who cannot bat four hundred in Big League society. He muffs all the niceties that identify and distinguish metropolitan vogue, and may be relied upon to pull

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a bone on the bases of any drawing-room." Agatha listened, her sewing in her lap, and her mouth wide open. Then, as though further to elucidate, Ruth continued: "He is closely related to the gentlemen who wear chin-whiskers and carry wicker suit-cases and blow out the gas. He is found principally upon the stage."

"After such an illuminating description," said Agatha, finally, "no one could entertain the slightest uncertainty as to what a 'hick' is!" Then, after a moment, she added, "And you say this young man whom you call 'Alan' is *not* a 'hick'? I should, perhaps, have thought otherwise."

"Not so that you could notice it!" said Ruth, with emphasis. "He is not at all astounded at the tall buildings; and he has had just as good an education as though he had gone to Harvard or Yale. In fact, probably better, for I think he said that Cornell put it all over Harvard and Yale in both baseball and rowing—football, too, if I'm not mistaken! He pitched on The 'Varsity and rowed stroke on the crew—so you can see he's got just as much culture as anybody!"

"Hmmm!" mused Agatha, with tightly closed lips. "You seem to have acquired a surprisingly comprehensive knowledge of the young man's career in a short time. No doubt he made himself out quite a hero to you?"

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"Oh, *he* didn't tell me—it was the Judge," said Ruth. "The Judge told me all of this in the brief intervals in which he was not talking about you."

"And it is evident that you are much impressed—you are quite a champion of his?"

"Oh, yes! I'm strong for him! I'd have no hesitancy in offering him a contract to play on my nine at a high salary. He——"

"Ruth Loring," said her mother, impatiently, "this is simply atrocious! I haven't the slightest idea what all this unintelligible jargon is about, but that any girl with the slightest pretension to refinement should indulge in slang the way you do is positively amazing! I do not understand——"

"I do but quote the absent though not forgotten Dicky Whittlesey," said Ruth, in justification. "Besides, Dicky Whittlesey says that it's not slang—it's Americanese."

"Dicky Whittlesey says a lot of things that you would do well to forget. And as for this young man—the idea of you calling him 'Alan'!—I most earnestly desire that you do not encourage his attentions any further—to say nothing of having him call here! I am surprised and shocked that such a degree of familiarity should have developed between you in so short a time."

"Alan is a fast little worker," said Ruth, complacently.

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"Is he, indeed! So it seems!" said her mother, with sardonic disapproval. "And I must request that you discontinue this association—I do not wish him to call here, nor do I wish you to go riding with every Tom, Dick, and Harry that you meet. Let us regard that as settled!"

"Mayn't I go riding with Alan if he comes for me in a red and green sleigh—a nice, freshly painted one?" asked Ruth, demurely.

Agatha shut up like a clam. She rocked back and forth, with tightly compressed lips, and sewed assiduously. Neither spoke for perhaps half an hour, though Ruth stole glances at her mother now and then. She could not quite make up her mind whether Agatha was angry or was trying to keep from laughing. Finally, Ruth rose from the hammock and laid aside her book; she went over and kissed her mother, who did not respond to the caress.

"I think I'll go out and discourage some of the weeds in my rose-garden," she said, picking up a trowel that lay near the piazza. She was some distance away when Agatha called to her, and Ruth came back.

"You haven't told me yet what the Judge said about me!" said Agatha.

CHAPTER XII

AND so it came about that Mr. Joe Belcher announced that he had decided not to press the charge of grand larceny against Fatty Jennings.

"I've thought the matter over," he said, with as benevolent an air as he could assume, "an' I've come to the conclusion that maybe the boy has been punished enough, and that mebbe this'll be a lesson to him in the future. I hope 'twill! Then Judge Peabody, he come to me and he pleaded so hard for the youngster—well, anyhow, I thought it was just as well to let the matter drop where 'twas."

It goes without saying that Fatty and the gang, of which John Peabody was now a full-fledged member, were greatly relieved, and the occasion was one for much rejoicing. Fatty, too, became a person of vastly enhanced importance, but was inclined to wear his honors rather meekly, as he had been fairly well impressed with the enormity of his crimes, a long list of which had been dragged out of a supposedly forgotten past, and paraded in grand review before him. He was, in a degree, chastened, and was thoroughly convinced that he had had a very narrow escape.

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"Oh, shucks! Forget it!" said Snootey Judd, after listening to Fatty's recital for the ninth time, "I knew th' Judge 'd fix it! I wasn't a bit skeert o' you havin' to go to th' coop!"

"Well, I dunno," said Fatty, shaking his head doubtfully, "I guess 'f you'd 'a' heard Ol' Belcher talk, an' my father an' Peel Brackett—he was sore 'cause I bit him—I guess 'f you heard what they said to me, you wouldn't 'a' bin so sure. It took some fixin', I don't care what the Judge says! Ol' Belcher wouldn't never 'a' let up—'cept fer the Judge, an I know it!"

"Co'se not!" said Jim. "He done it! Didn't he come 'cross wid twenty-two dollahs—da's whut done de business! Money talks! How yo' 'spec yo' gwine pay all dat back to de Jedge?"

"I dunno," said Fatty, dubiously, as it seemed like a very large contract. "I got sixty cents left out of the two and a half that the Judge got back from Bradley for me for the Rheumarism cure. I c'n put that towards it."

At this announcement, Jim took a pair of dice from his pocket and made them rattle in his closed hand. Whistling nochalantly, he rolled them in the dirt, and snapped his fingers professionally, as he inspected the throw. "Whar at has yo' got 'at sixty cents?" he asked, speculatively.

"I got it—where I got it!" replied Fatty, with

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some asperity, as though slightly suspicious of a possibly sinister motive in the inquiry. "I got it buried," he added, after a moment; "that's where I got it!"

"Money ain' no seeds," said Jim, with sage contempt; "'tain't gwine grow in de groun'!"

"No, an' t'ain't goin' to be lost shootin' craps, if it stays in the ground, neither!" said Fatty, with decision, and with the air of one who had had experience.

"Huh!" said Jim, with lofty prodigality, "whut good is sixty cents! Le's go dig 'er up? Ah don' b'leeve yo' got no sixty cents, no how!"

"Y' don't, hey?" said Fatty, bristling; "well, you jes' come 'ith me an' I'll show you whether I have er not! I'll jes' go git it an give it to the Judge, thats what I'll do!"

Fatty led the procession to his back yard and out behind the barn; but once on the scene of the buried treasure, his face assumed a dismayed look. He stood for a moment scratching his head in evident perplexity, while the other boys waited expectantly. He walked some distance from the corner of the barn and inspected the ground here and there, but evidently the inspection was unsatisfactory and revealed nothing. After a moment, the other boys joined him.

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"What did y' do, Fatty—hide it so well y' can't find it yerself?" asked Snootey.

"He didn' hide nuthin'!" said Jim, cynically. "Ah done tol' yo' all he didn' have no sixty cents! Ol' Fat jes' bluffin'! He done say he berry 'er so's we ain' gwine ax 'im fer none!"

"I did, too!" declared Fatty, indignantly. "It's buried right here—some place! Right 'round here!" And Fatty examined the ground frantically for a considerable distance in every direction. John and Snootey also scrutinized the ground, but Jim remained not only a Doubting Thomas, but a scoffer as well.

"Didn't you mark the spot in any way?" asked John, solicitously.

"Sure, I did!" protested Fatty. "I marked it in the reg'lar way—same's they always do in the books—Cap'n Kidd, an' fellers like him. I buried 'er where the shadow of the corner o' th' barn falls at twelve o'clock at night, by the light o' the moon. I guess I'll have to wait till twelve o'clock to-night to find 'er. I'll bet I c'd find 'er if it hadn't 'a' rained!"

"Huh!" scoffed Jim, "Ah reck'n yo' bettah set up an' watch! Sumbuddy gwine sneak up an' move de bahn on yo'!"

"You mean somebuddy'll move the moon!" said Snootey, who, being a fisherman, was up in things

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astronomical. "Th' moon's different ev'ry night—she comes up at one time one night, an' another time th' next night—a whole lot later. The shadder wouldn't be in the same place two nights hand-runnin'—yo' gotta wait a month till th' moon's in the same place!"

"Yas, an' sumtime she come on to rain like it done las' night, an' dey ain't no moon," said Jim comfortingly. "Ah reck'n yo' kin kiss dat sixty cents good-bye!"

"Well, I believe we can find it, if we all hunt for it," said John, who was plainly sympathetic; "let's all get in a line an' get down on our hands and knees about where Fatty thinks it is, and dig up the whole place?"

"That's a good idea!" said Fatty. "C'm on!" and he got down and crawled around in the soft mud, turning up the ground with his jack-knife. Snootey and John followed suit, but Jim remained erect, not caring to participate in this needle-in-a-hay-stack business. Finally, he went over and sat in the shade, his back against the barn, and commented sarcastically on the efforts of the other boys.

"Ah reck'ns dat sixty am *daid an' berried*," he chuckled. "Look to me lak 's long's yo' all on yo'r knees, yo' all bettah pray fo' 'er! Mammy say dey's a heap o' powah in pra'r!"

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"Yes," said Fatty, warningly, "an' 'f you dont help, you won't get any of it when we find it!"

"Huh! Ah sh'd worry!" said Jim, contemptuously. "Ah don' want none of hit! Ah reck'n 'f Ah was 'pendin' on dat sixty cents, Ah gwine be broke fo' de res' o' mah life! 'Sides, yo' 'low t' giv' 'er to de Jaidge on 'count o' dem twenty-two dollahs. Ah reck'n yo' still gwine owe de Jaidge twenty-two. He's de chief mo'nah at de grave o' de sixty!"

The three boys kept up the search, turning up the ground to the depth of two or three inches.

"'F it hadn't 'a' rained las' night," said Fatty, as he paused and surveyed the mud on his hands and knees, "I'll bet I couldn' 'a' found 'er right off. 'T wa'n't buried deep."

"Well," said Snootey, "as he rose and scraped the mud from various portions of himself, "it's buried too deep fer me! I got 'nuff! Look a' my clothes! It kin stay buried, fer all me!" And Snootey joined Jim and sat with his back against the barn, and watched Fatty and John as they continued the search. Fatty, too, was beginning to show signs of weakening, but John continued with unrelaxed diligence.

"Ol' Fatty cert'n'y am a boob!" commented Jim. "An' yo' is a suckah t' go crawlin' 'roun' in de mud! He git a li'l change an' den he gotta go berry 'er in de mud, sumplace! Ah kin berry all Ah gits right in

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mah pocket! Don' need t' wait fer no moon t' shine t' fin' dat!"

After a moment, the perspiring Fatty concluded to call it a day, too, and joined Jim and Snootey at the barn, leaving John to continue the search alone. Before Fatty had time to think up an answer to the jibes that the merciless Jim was directing at him, a loud yell from John brought them all to their feet.

"I've found it!" he shouted, and proceeded to scoop up a number of coins and a considerable quantity of mud. The three boys ran to him, and John triumphantly handed over the sticky mass to Fatty. An audit revealed that the sixty cents were intact. Jim's attitude changed at the sight of the money. "How much is yo' gwine giv' us fo' helpin' fin' 'er," asked Jim. "'Bout fifteen cents is 'nuff fo' me."

"Us?" said Fatty, with withering sarcasm, as he wiped the coins on the bosom of his shirt. "Us? When did it git to be 'us' that found it. 'F any-buddy gits anythin', it otta be John—I guess a dime's 'bout right, fer th' money reely b'longs t' th' Judge." And he proffered a muddy dime to John, who drew back bashfully and declined to take it.

"Ah'll settle fo' a nickel," said Jim, tentatively. "Ah wouldn't git all dis heah mud on mah feets fo' less'n a nickel!"

After some argument, it was finally decided by Fatty that each of the three boys should have a

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nickel, and a settlement on that basis was arranged.

"That leaves forty-five cents fer the Judge," he said. Then, after thinking it over for a moment, he added, "I don't know but I'm 'titled to five cents fer myself—I done a lot o' huntin', an' I got a dollar's worth o' mud onto me!"

This seemed fair, and Fatty put five cents in one pocket and forty in the other, and the party started for the Judge's office. When they reached the smooth board sidewalk, Jim took the dice out of his pocket and rattled them in his hand.

"How 'bout a li'l Afr'can golf?" said Jim, rolling the bones seductively. "Shoot a nickel!" he declared, by way of a challenge.

Fatty hesitated; "I can't," he said. "I otta give this forty cents to th' Judge."

"Huh!" scoffed Jim, "Yo' is a hot spo't! Yo' got a nickel, ain't yo'?"

"All right!" said Fatty, "I'll shoot a nickel—*but that's all!*"

. Alas! There are many "Fattys" in the world! And the lure of the Goddess of Chance is very strong! A certain well informed and exceedingly shrewd gentleman once said that "There is one born every minute!" However, "Let him who is without sin cast the first stone."

That night, when Jim returned very late for his dinner, Easter Sunday seized him and laid him

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across her knees and lifted her brawny hand to administer the chastening that falls to the lot of the erring. The hand did not fall—at least upon the inverted Jim—for sixty muddy cents and two dice slipped from somewhere within his person, and tinkled and rolled upon the floor. Easter set aside the business in hand without ceremony, and gathered up the sixty cents, with as much celerity as her avoirdupois would permit, and put them into a jug that stood high up on the kitchen mantel. She looked at the dice, and started to appropriate them, too. But after a little thought, she concluded, under the circumstances, to let Jim retain them!

“Ah’ll learn yo’ to gamm’le!” she said, reprovingly, but with some ambiguity.

Alone in his chamber, the outraged and plundered Jim crawled into bed, and meditated upon the mutability of riches, and the inconveniences of having a mother.

“Doggone!” he said, to himself, “Ol’ Fat ain’ sech a fool as he look! De nex’ time Ah git sixty cents, Ah’s gwine berry ’er, too!”

Easter Sunday took down the jug and emptied the coins into her hand and counted them. “Sixty cents!” she muttered. “Ah reck’n dat jes’ ’bout git sum sof’-shell crabs fo’ de Jaidge’s bre-kfus.”

Oh, Poetic Justice! Thou art frequently on the job!

CHAPTER XIII

Just so surely as the summer came to Spring Valley, with equal sureness came the picnic under the auspices of the Methodist Church. It was fully as certain as those synonyms of inevitability, Death and Taxes—perennial and, as some might have put it, inexorable. It had come to be an institution, about as well recognized as the Fourth of July and Christmas; and the Spring Valley Methodist Church would about as soon have thought of abandoning the Wednesday evening prayer-meeting or services on Easter Sunday, as to forego the annual picnic. Everybody and his relations went; denomination made no difference; nor did race nor color nor previous condition of servitude. In fact, so greatly did this picnic overshadow all other similar functions, that it had come to be known as “the” picnic, in distinction from all others.

As the time for the big event drew near, the usual form of salutation became, “Are you going to the picnic?” instead of, “How do you do?” or, “It looks like we might have rain to-day.” The question was entirely perfunctory, for it is not recorded that any one had ever answered in the negative.

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Tommy had engaged to escort Susie, and Charley had bespoken Lily and it was all arranged, more or less satisfactorily, according to the law of selection which regulates such matters. Maybe, Charley wanted Susie, but Tommy cut in ahead of him and a rearrangement was made necessary. Frequently these engagements were made a whole year in advance, on the way home from the picnic or even during the festivities, it being assumed by the contracting parties that their present amicable, or amatory, relations would endure for at least that period. In one instance, a particularly popular belle signed up for three years in advance with three different young men—not that she was a fickle jade, but just naturally wanted to distribute herself around to please everybody. This may, in a measure, account for her popularity. Whether she met these various annual obligations when they fell due deponent sayeth not.

The picnic was always the Judge's busy day—he was more in demand than any six other persons put together. Not only did his love of children impel him to do everything he could to enhance their enjoyment, but the fact is, he enjoyed it himself.

Genuine happiness is contagious, and the juvenile mind is not greatly deceived by a thin veneer of feigned gaiety over a solid body of ennui. The Judge refused to be bored at the picnic. He did not sit around and say, "Isn't it delightful to see the

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dear children so happy! I wonder what time the wagons start for home?" Not any! That wasn't the Judge's way. He organized and participated in See-saw and Ring-around-a-rosy and London-Bridge-is-falling-down, and he had just as good a time as anybody when it came to playing "One-old-cat" or "Duck-on-a-rock." And the skill with which he allowed any kid to beat him at "pitchin quoits" was admirable. He could deal the ice-cream and cake and sandwiches, and see that everybody got a good hand, and he could always "find more" of anything.

He knew exactly what to do when the poison-ivy got in its fine work, and he was right there with the ammonia-bottle when Mrs. Hopkins' little Clarence injudiciously toyed with the business-end of a bumble-bee. He could take out the burrs that "that horrid Jennings boy" put in Mamie's curls without hurting the child a bit. He could sort out the red ants from the sandwiches and the pickles, or from little Sammy's underwear, with great deftness and thoroughness. And he was "Johnnie-on-the-spot" when little Gwendolyn McGillicuddy ate entirely too much ice-cream, or when Willie fell into the pond in his new suit.

Many years attendance at the picnic had caused the Judge to regard all these occurrences as quite customary and regular and as matters of course, and

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to be prepared for them; and subsequent picnics had not made it necessary to make any revision in the casualty-list—except, perhaps, to add to it. Occasionally, somebody fell out of a tree, or got lost, or over-estimated his ability to swim across the pond. What's a picnic for, anyhow?

It must not be imagined that the Judge was officious or tried to exercise any unwelcome supervision over anybody—nothing like it, at all! He just aided and abetted those who were having a good time, and brought cheer and comfort to those who were heavy of heart. *The Spring Valley Spectator*, published nearly every week, always maintained in its write-up of the picnic that "a good time was had by all." If the report were veracious, "the good time" was largely due to the efforts of the Judge.

As far as the general run of happenings was concerned, this particular picnic did not differ materially from the picnics that had preceded it, nor, probably, from those that would follow. The general average of casualties was maintained, both in quantity and kind, and probably the sum-total of happiness was about the same, although everybody said that it was the "best picnic ever!" However, as this verdict had been rendered annually for some decades, no great importance need be attached to it.

The Judge was perhaps slightly more active than usual both in the promotion of gaiety and in the

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alleviation of distress, and gave the impression of being ubiquitous. He turned up at exactly the right minute in all parts of the grounds, seeming to know intuitively that as soon as he had fished Willie out of the pond, he was due some distance away to administer such aid and comfort as he could to little Hazel Perkins who had had a front tooth knocked out by a swing. And as soon as he had separated and made peace between Lefty McCarthy and Luke Brackett, who had come to a clinch, he would have to hurry over and ask the boys who were having target practice with their sling-shots to direct their fire another way. This latter action was not altogether intuitive, but prompted by a yell of emphatic protest from Easter Sunday who had been hit by a stray buck-shot as she stooped over to stir the lemonade. It was, perhaps, slightly doubtful whether the buck-shot was a "stray" one, for there was considerable suppressed hilarity among the boys over the "accident," and it was indisputable that the target offered by Easter when she assumed the said position was not only hard to miss, but more or less irresistible.

"The buck-shot had to go *some-place!*" said the boy, in extenuation of his act, as he looked at Easter and called attention to the fact that she occupied a considerable portion of the horizon. "Most any

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shot that don't hit the target is liable to hit 'er!" said the boy.

There were, however, some unusual features to the occasion—features resulting from the attendance of Ruth and Agatha and John Peabody. Agatha had of course, attended "the picnic" in her girlhood, for that institution was a perennial permanency even then. She remember, too, that upon the occasion of her last attendance, she had been accompanied by the Judge. She remembered being slightly miffed because the Judge—or, rather, Martin Peabody, as he was then—had deemed it necessary to devote much of his time to other people than herself. The Judge acted about the same then as he did now, as far as she could see. Not that she would have allowed the Judge to think that she was paying any attention to him or noticing what he did now—not for worlds! But she found herself watching him unconsciously, and she felt annoyed every time she caught herself at it. But the fact is that she was given small opportunity for reminiscence. The Hon. Jim Ramsay also attended the picnic. While he could not be considered as "a regular," picnics and like gatherings are good places for shaking hands with voters and ascertaining which way the wind blows—a knowledge which is valuable to a man like Ramsay. The November election was not so far off, and political fences, no matter how

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substantial, need looking after, and The Hon. Jim seldom over-looked a bet like "the picnic."

What was more surprising, Jim came with Ruth and Agatha in the Loring car. He was just coming out of the post-office when the car drove up, and Ruth's cordial invitation to accompany them, supplemented by Agatha's presence and encouragement, impelled that gentleman to forego any aversion and timidity that he had for risking his life in the car—a thing which he had solemnly promised himself he would never do.

"You need not be in the least timid, Mr. Ramsay," laughed Ruth, as she noticed a slight hesitation on Jim's part, "I am no longer a speed-merchant. Besides," she added, assuringly, as Ramsay climbed into the car, "Mother doesn't like to go faster than fifty miles an hour."

"I guess if Mrs. Loring can stand it, I can!" said Jim, with the air of a man who is prepared for the worst.

During Ramsay's stay at the picnic, if he detached himself from Agatha at all, it was for such brief moments as were required to attend to her wants in the way of refreshment, amusement, or comfort. And this course of conduct was encouraged by Agatha, herself; for Ramsay was far too astute a man to force his attentions upon anybody. If it were a part of Agatha's plan to parade Ramsay

before the Judge as her courtier to the Judge's discomfiture, it certainly succeeded, for the Judge gave every evidence of the placid calm of a fish out of water, and try as he would, he could not conceal his annoyance, and Agatha made the most of it. She contrived to carry on several animated tête-à-têtes with the Hon. Jim in the immediate vicinity of the Judge; and she responded to Ramsay's essay's at gallantry in so appreciative a way, that Jim, shrewd as he was, came to the conclusion that he was "making a killing." Her rather chilly and distant greeting to the Judge when they met, gave the latter very little encouragement to enter into any competition with Ramsay in the matter of attention to her; and the Judge's manifold activities left him little time or opportunity to pursue such a course had he been encouraged. Once during the afternoon, the Judge managed to get near enough to her to ask, "Is there anything I can get you, Agatha?" Jim had left her sitting under a tree, for a moment, while he had gone for more sandwiches and coffee.

"No, I thank you, Judge Peabody," said Agatha, sweetly as she picked up Jim's hat and smoothed it caressingly, "Mr. Ramsay is looking after me very nicely."

"Humph!" muttered the Judge, plainly disgusted. "I wonder if anybody is looking after Ramsay?" he said enigmatically. "Oh, yes!" said Agatha, smil-

ing maliciously. "I think someone is!" And the Judge hurried away from there as fast as he could go.

From a distance, Jim Ramsay had witnessed the Judge's excommunication with considerable satisfaction, and thereafter, he assumed, more than ever, an air of proprietorship with the lady that she not only permitted, but, under which, to make an entirely fitting metaphor, she purred. It was perhaps fortunate for Mr. Jim Ramsay's sense of elation at this that he forgot, for the moment, that anything that purrs has claws; and also that it is difficult, if not impossible, to tell what a cat is thinking about.

Ruth and Alan—they had, of course, managed to "team up" within five minutes after her arrival—constituted themselves as aides-de-camp to the Judge, and to Easter Sunday, who, by common and enthusiastic assent, was in charge of the refreshments. Whether they were actuated by a desire to be of use, or whether they took the job as a means of getting into close association, is a matter in which they should, perhaps, have the benefit of the doubt. At any rate, they did not continue in the capacity of lieutenants for any great length of time, but found that they had their hands full attending to their own affairs; and they also discovered that it was lots nicer to be a little apart from the crowd—all of which did not tend to increase Agatha's peace

of mind, and accounted for her desire to go away from there a trifle earlier than she otherwise would. She had begun to feel that the intimacy between Ruth and Alan was getting a little closer than she liked it to be and she resolved to discourage it. Heretofore, she had thought that much of Ruth's talk about Alan was mere persiflage and was designed to tease her, and she had taken it with a grain of salt; but of late, she had noticed many things that caused her some uneasiness, and she determined that it should be nipped in the bud before it became at all serious.

John Peabody was having the time of his young life. It was his first picnic. Once before, he had been herded and huddled on an excursion barge and sent up the East River toward a picnic grove; but it had rained hard all day, and it was decided by the committee that it would be inadvisable to land, and he had come home wet and hungry and dejected, and could not have said truthfully that he had had a good time. But this picnic was nothing like the former one. The boy's gentle, honest ways had endeared him to all his companions and to as many of the older people in the village as he had come in contact. In addition to this fact, he was the Judge's protege, and the Judge was popular with about everybody. With the vast majority of the people of Spring Valley, John had been accepted at his face

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value—a boy who had been left destitute by the death of his parents, and who had been given a home by the Judge out of the goodness of his heart. Most people were willing to let it go at that; but Agatha was not of these. Had she not heard the Judge admit and the boy acknowledge that he was “the Judge’s boy?” And had she not been present when the child had been delivered to him by the founding-asylum official and heard all the conversation? In fact, throughout the village, John was known as “the Judge’s boy.” She felt that the boy formed a barrier between herself and the Judge—an insuperable obstacle in the path that led to a resumption not only of anything like the relations that had once existed between them, but in the path of any kind of relations whatever. On the several occasions when she had met the Judge unavoidably, she had preserved toward him a distant and an indifferent attitude which left no doubt as to her disinclination to allow anything that savored of intimate and friendly intercourse. She had seen John but once—on the occasion in the office—and as she had then been absorbed in the Judge, it is not strange that she did not recognize the boy when she saw him at the picnic.

As she and Ramsay stood near to where Easter dished out the ice-cream, John passed and Easter called out to him. “Look ya’, Honey! I ain’t seen

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yo' *eatin'* none o' dis ya' ice-cream. Yo' bin comin' ya' an' gittin' hit fo' somebuddy else, but I ain't saw yo' *eatin'* none! Has yo' e't any—da's whut I wanna fin' out?"

"Not yet, Easter," answered John, "I didn't feel very hungry, and I got some for Miss Loring and Mr. Bailey—they are off under a tree and they didn't want to come way over here."

Probably the hearing of her own name attracted Agatha's attention to the boy and she cast a hurried glance toward the tree under which Ruth and Alan had seated themselves. Seeing that everything was all right and proper as far as that was concerned, she again turned her attention to the boy.

"Come ya'!" said Easter, in peremptory tones, and John obeyed smilingly. Easter scooped a dish of cream from the almost empty freezer and put it into John's hand. "Cl'ar dat off!" she commanded. "Nemmin' 'bout de res'! Yo' cl'ar dat off! Don' lemme ketch yo' givin' dat away, less 'n yo' wants me to skin yo' 'live! I ain't saw yo' eat *nuthin'*! Da 's de las' dish!"

John grinned and thanked Easter, and started away with the dish of cream but he didn't get very far. A greedy little rat of about four ran to him, and after a parley, John handed over the cream. But before the boy could take a mouthful of it, a sharp-faced woman ran to him, snatched the saucer

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away from the child, and thrust it roughly back into John's astonished hands, spilling much of it over him.

"Serves you right!" snapped the woman, viciously. "That 'll teach you to mind your own business and let respectable children alone and stay where you belong hereafter!" And she yanked the small boy away as though John were contagion. John didn't understand it at all, and he looked wonderingly at the woman.

"I'm sorry," he said, gently, "but I didn't think I was doing any harm. Your little boy asked me for the cream and——"

"Shut up, you little Nobody, and don't come 'round respectable folks!" said the woman, with all the venom that she could put into the words, and then she sailed away, dragging the yelling youngster after her. John stood dazed for a moment, and then turned slowly away.

"Why, what on earth is the meaning of that?" asked Agatha of Ramsay. "The child was simply trying to do a kindness—what could have prompted the woman to talk that way?"

"Well," said Ramsay, hesitating a little awkwardly, "that is the Judge's boy, and—I guess—mebbe——"

"Oh!" said Agatha. Then, after a pause: "Even so, I can't see why she should be so brutal. The

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boy didn't do anything—hasn't done anything! Is that the way people treat him—and the Judge?"

"Well, no," said Ramsay, slowly, "I can't say that it is. I guess most people treat the boy all right, but there's some—well, you know how folks feel about—things like that. But I guess Mrs. Ketchum was a little severe. She's a sister to Miss Shumway, and I hear that Miss Shumway is considerably disturbed about the Judge bringing the boy here to Spring Valley."

"What do people say about the Judge?" asked Agatha.

"Well," said Ramsay, "outside of a few, nobody says anything, much. Of course, there are some that say pretty hard things about him. But," he added, smiling, "you know the Judge—he don't care much what people say. He's just like a boy—pretty headstrong and never takes consequences into consideration. If folks don't like what he does, they can—do the other thing!"

It was some time before Agatha spoke; she prodded a hole in the ground at least six inches deep with the end of her parasol and gave no evidence that she knew Ramsay was with her. "He's a beautiful boy!" she said finally.

"Yes, he is a nice boy," said Ramsay. "Seems to be a very nice boy! I feel mighty sorry for him!"

Again there was a long pause as Agatha sat think-

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ing soberly; finally, she sighed. "It must be very hard for him!" she said, sympathetically. "Very hard indeed!"

"Undoubtedly it is hard!" agreed Ramsay. "It will follow him all his life—and even afterwards."

"And I suppose," she went on, a conflict manifestly raging within her, "that we ought to do all we can to make his burden lighter."

Not a doubt in the world of it!" said Ramsay. "I know that I shall, for one!" And he spoke as though he meant it.

Another long pause: "It seems a shame that the Judge, after his life-long record for uprightness and kindness and good deeds, should——" Agatha stopped and put her handkerchief to her eyes.

"Ain't it a shame!" acquiesced Jim, with indignation. "Nobody 'a' thought it of him! But you never can tell—they all seem to let their foot slip—some time! But he should be made to suffer for any such——"

"Who should be made to suffer?" asked Agatha, taking the handkerchief from her eyes and looking at Ramsay with an astonished, puzzled face.

"Why, the Judge, of course!" said Ramsay. "His reprehensible conduct in this matter——"

"Indeed?" said Agatha, rising, and looking scathingly at the Hon. Jim, "When I said that it must be very hard for him, I was thinking of the

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Judge! It was the Judge whom I thought we ought to help! Of course, I am very sorry for the boy—but I think it is terrible for the poor Judge, too! And you think he should be made to suffer?” and Agatha began to make preparations for departure. “Well, I have had a most delightful afternoon, Mr. Ramsay. I must be going now.” And she started away, leaving the astounded Jim with his mouth wide open. The Judge happened to be passing within a few yards of them and Agatha went straight to him with a bewitching smile. The Judge felt inclined to rub his eyes to assure himself that his sight were not playing him tricks.

“Martin,” she said, loud enough for Ramsay to hear, “I think you’ve done quite enough for one day! Do let me take you home in the car—or, better, let me bring you to dinner at our house. I know you must be tired out.”

“My dear Agatha,” said the Judge, regretfully, “I’m afraid that’s impossible! You see,” he said, looking at his watch, “it’s only half-past three and the children won’t *think* about going home till six, it wouldn’t do for me to leave them. This is just the time I *have* to be on hand.”

“I’m sorry,” said Agatha, a little stiffly, as she moved quickly away. Then there were two men who stood and looked after her with open mouths!

It is unfortunate that the Hon. Jim—and the

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Judge, too, for that matter—had forgotten that anything that purrs also has claws, and that it is next to impossible to tell what a cat is thinking about. There was enough “cat” in Agatha Loring to justify the metaphor.

Agatha marched straight over to where Alan and Ruth sat under the tree. John saw her coming and rose from his seat on the grass and smiled amiably, but Ruth remained seated.

“How do you do, Mr.——er——” began Agatha freezingly.

“‘Bailey,’ ” supplied Ruth and Alan in unison.

“Ah, yes—Bailey,” said Agatha. “Ruth I shall have to ask you to drive me home, if Mr. Bailey will excuse you. The day has been a trifle wearing—no doubt you have felt it to—and I am rather tired.”

“Why, Mother,” protested Ruth, “What’s the rush? It’s only the shank of the afternoon—’t isn’t four o’clock yet! Home was never like this!”

“No doubt,” sniffed Agatha, “but unfortunately, one’s desires are not regulated by the clock.”

“What’s the big idea?” asked Ruth, quizzically. “Wasn’t that Ramsay man nice to you? I thought you two were perfectly pally just a few moments ago—in fact, for hours.”

“Mr. Ramsay was very entertaining indeed,” said Agatha, in a way that left no doubt that she would

like to attend his execution, "but I wish to go now. I'm sure Mr.——er —— Bailey will excuse you?"

"Most certainly," said Alan, politely, bowing.

"Well," said Ruth, resignedly, getting up from the grass, "orders is orders, as we say in the army. Au revoir, Alan!"

And Ruth linked her arm in Agatha's affectionately, and they made their way to the car.

Neither spoke much during the ride home; and at the door, Ruth jumped out and assisted her mother to alight. Agatha turned toward the house, but Ruth stepped into the car and started away.

"Why—Ruth!" called the astonished Agatha. "Where are you going?"

"Back to the picnic!" shouted Ruth, as the car turned a bend in the drive.

CHAPTER XIV

It must not be imagined that in such a town as Spring Valley, any man, even though he have the character and reputation which the Judge possessed, could bring a strange boy into his home and treat him with fondness, without arousing suspicion and comment. Among the blue-stocking element, and even among those who possessed some breadth of view, there was a general lifting of eyebrows and a pursing of lips. Not that there was the slightest fact that any of these busy-bodies could put a finger on—that isn't necessary—an evil mind doesn't need any peg on which to hang its innuendo.

The Judge had said—when he had felt it necessary to speak of the matter at all—that the boy was the son of an old friend who had died, leaving the child alone in the world, and that he had gladly taken him into his home until such time as a more favorable berth should present itself—which was the approximate truth.

The sitters in front of Bradley's store, not one of whom made even the slightest pretense of supporting either himself or his family, continued to be greatly concerned about the matter and debated it at

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length on frequent occasions and appeared to have a sharp eye out lest, in some manner, the high moral tone of the village should be impaired.

"I c'd 'a' told ye the Jedge was a gay, ol' dog!" said Syl Larrabee, as he watched the Judge and John out of sight, and then tipped back his chair against the building.

"Says th' boy b'longs t' some niece, er sumthin' thet's dead, don't he?"

And Syl snickered, and spat at a bug that was crawling desperately for the edge of the porch. The attention of the other sitters being thus attracted to the bug, they let go a barrage of tobacco-juice with such surprising accuracy that the poor bug was ultimately overwhelmed.

"Be'longs to a *'friend'* thet's dead," corrected Abner Judd, making a direct hit on the bug. "So he *says!*" he added.

Abner put quite a little emphasis on the "says!" He was supposed to speak with authority and to have an intimate and comprehensive knowledge of the Judge's affairs on account of his daily visits to the office for tobacco, matches, the newspaper, and the occasional quarter.

"Huh!" sneered Eb Timmons, "Must 'a' bin a mighty p'tic'lar friend! I've heared 'bout them kind o' friends b'fore!"

"The thing is," said Larrabee, "'t ain't goin' t'

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do no good t' jes' set here an' talk—is anybuddy goin' t' *do* anythin' 'bout it? Thet's whut I'd like t' know!"

"Well," said 'Bij Higgins, who up to this time had preserved a judicious, as well as a judicial, silence, "I reckon 't don't do th' c'mun'ty no gre't good to hev boys like this here one buttin' inta it—boys nobuddy knows nuthin' 'bout. But I dunno 's I see what I kin do, a'zackly."

"Same here!" said Eb Timmons. "I'm jes' as much intristed in upholdin' th' good name o' th' c'mun'ty as you be, but I can't see nuthin' t' do. Th' on'y one 'at reely *knows* anythin' is Abner, here." And he looked at Abner in a way that seemed to put it up to him.

"My lips is sealed!" said the latter, hastily, apparently taking refuge behind the sanctity of confidential communication.

"I reckon we c'n leave it to th' wimmen," said Higgins, who was known to possess expert opinion on this point, his wife being generally called "the village newspaper."

"The wimmen's almighty liable to sense any goin's-on o' thet kind! They nose 'em out some way!" concluded Higgins.

Abner Judd did not seem content to allow this tribute to the perspicacity of the fair sex to pass unchallenged: "I dunno," he said, shaking his head

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as though in grave doubt as to whether the matter might be left in feminine hands, "I dunno 'bout th' wimmen—some on 'em, anyhow. I jes' happened t' mention th' matter t' my ol' woman, an' she like to took my head off!"

"Same here!" exclaimed Timmons; "I happened t' mention it to Mis' Simpson, an' I swan! I cum near gettin' 'saulted!"

"Wall," said Syl Larrabee, "they ain't all thet way. The's some as won't countenance no immeral'ty in our midst."

Abner Judd tipped his chair forward until the front legs rested on the floor and glared at Mr. Larrabee belligerently: "Was you insinuatins' 'at my wife's goin' 'round countenancin' immeral'ty, Syl Larrabee?"

"No, I wa'n't," said Syl, "I was jes' a-sayin'."

"Wall, yo' wanta be kind o' careful how yo' go 'round 'jes' a-sayin'! Them things gits t' be 'folks says,' after a spell, an' I don't want no 'folks says,' 'bout my wife—ner me, neither!"

Abner would have given a good deal if he could have thought of the Judge's "preposterous hypothesis," but the only thing he could think of was "hipopotamus," and that didn't seem quite right, and he decided not to take a chance.

There is no telling where inventive speculation like this would have led, or into what depths of the

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uncharted sea of "immemoriality" the sitters would have consigned the Judge and John Peabody, had not the attention of these scandal-mongers been diverted to another matter of the most startling nature. Ruth Loring's 60-HP. Stutz "bear-cat" went thundering by under the guidance of that dashing young lady; and sitting on the middle of his back, on the low seat beside her, his long legs reaching away out under the instrument-board, was no less a personage than the Hon. Jim Ramsay!

Sakes alive!

Here was a morsel to roll under tongues! And the sitters, as though it were part of a drill, brought the front legs of their chairs down to the floor with a thump, and craned their necks after the receding pair!

As a matter of fact, no great importance was really attachable to the matter; Ruth had driven down to "th' depo'" for an expected express-package, and as the Hon. Mr. Ramsay had come in on "th' noon train," she obligingly offered to drive him up to the bank, which was his objective. But leave it to "Bradley's parliament" to handle such "carryin's-on" as this! Inside of ten minutes, they had doped it out that an elopement—or, at the very least—a marriage was in the making, and they dispersed some twenty minutes before they were due at home for

dinner, that there might be no delay in spreading the news.

To their intense chagrin, however, the agile and equally imaginative Mrs. Higgins, "the village newspaper," had seen the car go sailing by, and she had lost no time in putting on her bonnet and shawl, and had "beat 'em to it!" They found the ground already covered. And not only was it covered, but Mrs. Higgins had added corroborative detail which they had overlooked—" 'F you remember—I do, mighty well—her mother run away 'ith that Lorin' feller—jest like she's a-doin' 'ith Jim Ramsay! It's in th' blood!" And what more verification could anybody want than that?

The exact truth of the matter was, however, that Mr. Jim Ramsay, with his hat jammed down over his eyes and ears, his jaws set tight on his cigar, which left a trail of sparks behind, some going into his face, and with his hands convulsively clutching the seat, was in no condition whatever to indulge in erotic fancies. He was actually debating whether to jump or to stick, each course appearing to have manifest advantages, and he was about equally divided in his opinion as to which he would adopt. He had made up his mind to one thing, however, and that was, that if he ever got out of that car alive, he would never allow himself to be inveigled into it again.

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As the car tore around the corner near the bank, on two wheels, it narrowly missed a boy who was trying to induce a small and very forlorn-looking dog that embodied a large variety of breeds to follow him out of the danger-zone. The dog apparently wanted to commit suicide, and the boy was compelled to lift him in his arms and drag him almost from under the wheels of the car. Ruth brought the roadster to a very sudden and abrupt stop that nearly sent the Hon. Jim through the wind-shield, and his hat flew off and went hurtling away down the street. This seemed absolutely providential to Ramsay, and he alighted quickly from the car—to get hat! The boy, however, retrieved the hat, and, still carrying the dog, brought it to him.

"I'm perfectly mortified stiff, Mr. Ramsay!" laughed Ruth. "I don't know what you'll think of my driving?"

"Why," said Ramsay, "I think you're quite a driver!"—that being the best thing he could think of to say.

Ruth laughed: "I hope," she said, "that you'll forgive me for making your hat go skallyhooting off that way, but, you, see, I had to jam on the emergency to keep from running down that boy and his dog. Just jump in again, and I'll run you up the block to the bank."

"Oh, no, indeed!" said Ramsay, backing away.

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"I wouldn't think of troubling you—it's only a step, and you've been very kind as it is—very kind, indeed!"

"Isn't this that dear, little boy of the Judge's?" asked Ruth, looking at John. "Aren't you the Judge's boy, little man?"

"Yes, Ma'am," said John.

"I was sure of it," said Ruth. "You want to be careful of automobiles, little man—some careless driver may hit you!" Ramsay appeared to agree with this thoroughly.

"I wasn't afraid for myself," said the boy; "I thought you were going to run over the dog."

"He doesn't look very valuable, Son," said Ramsay, smiling, as he looked at the dog as it shivered in the boy's arms.

"No," admitted John, soberly, "I guess he wouldn't bring very much, but I guess he likes to live."

"Why, of course he does!" assented Ruth, "and I wouldn't run over him for worlds! I think he's a very nice dog! Is he your dog?"

"No," said John, "he doesn't seem to belong to anybody—seems sort of lost, and isn't sure where he wants to go. So I guess I'll take care of him till his owner comes along. I wouldn't like his owner to think I tried to steal him, though," he added,

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thoughtfully. "He's certainly a pretty nice dog!" he said, as the dog licked his hand.

"I imagine you can call him yours," said Ramsay, smiling. "I doubt if there is much of a search made for him! At any rate, here is a half-dollar—you can get a collar for him," and he held out the coin.

The boy drew back timidly, and raised his big eyes to Ramsay's face, but did not offer to take the money. "Thank you, very much!" he said, bashfully, "but a collar isn't good for a dog in the summer. It makes him hot and he doesn't like it. They always try to scratch them off."

"Well, maybe you can use the money some other way," Ramsay said, pleasantly, proffering it again. John drew further back: "I—I guess—I'd rather not," he said, coloring slightly, but showing that any further offer of the money would be useless.

Ramsay smiled and pocketed the coin. "Well," he said, "just as you like, but I must say that this is a new experience for me! Maybe he thinks its tainted?" And the man laughed grimly.

"Oh, I'm sure he doesn't!" said Ruth. "You don't think it's tainted money, do you, little man?"

"I don't think I know what you mean," said John, looking at them in a puzzled way. "It looked all right to me—just the same as any money—but—I didn't—like to take it."

"Well, Son," said Ramsay, perhaps more to Ruth

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than to John, "I advise you to start early in life taking any kind of money that you can get—it's a handy thing to have around the house."

"Uncle Martin doesn't take all he can get," said John, with conviction. "He wouldn't take some that a man tried to give him this morning. Uncle Martin was mad—so was the man."

"Why wouldn't your Uncle Martin take it?" asked Ramsay, interested.

"I don't know," answered John, "but, anyway, he told the man 'to take his dirty money and get out!' And the man did."

"Who was the man? Do you know him?" questioned Ramsay.

John thought a moment, and then looked from one to the other of his audience: "Yes, I know who he is, but—I don't know as it's right for me to tell such things," he said, gravely. Ramsay winced, but covered his discomfiture with a smile: "One wisenheimer!" he said, laughing.

Ruth laughed delightedly: "If he isn't a born gentleman, I never saw one!" she said, enjoying the way the boy had rebuffed Ramsay. "John," she said—"your name is John, isn't it?"

"Yes, Ma'am," said John—"John Peabody."

"Well, John Peabody, I'm going to ask you to come to see me, sometime; will you come?"

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"Yes, Ma'am," answered John, without any hesitation. "When shall I come?"

"Any time you see fit," smiled Ruth. "I receive from two until four any afternoon, unless you'd rather come in the morning—or evening!" she added, laughing.

"I'll come in the afternoon," said John, gravely, "maybe to-morrow."

"Fine!" said Ruth; "that's settled then. And now I must say good-by to you both, or I'll catch the dickens from my mother for being late. Sure you won't ride up to the bank, Mr. Ramsay?" she asked, a twinkle in her eye.

"Oh, no indeed!" said Ramsay, shying off. "It's just a step—I'll walk up there with John. Thank you, just the same!"

Ruth whizzed away, waving back at them, and John, still holding the dog, fell into step with Ramsay on the way to the bank.

"Do you like it here, John?" asked Ramsay, after they had proceeded a few steps; "better than where you came from?"

"Yes, Sir," said John.

"Let me see—where was it you came from—before you were here?" asked Ramsay, looking down at the boy appraisingly.

"From New York," said John, frankly.

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"Hmmm," mused Ramsay, "New York is a large place."

"Yes, Sir," said John, gravely, "it is."

Ramsay looked at the boy; he could not quite make up his mind whether John was stalling him off, or whether the boy did not understand the object of his remark about the size of New York. He thought a moment, and then started off on another tack.

"Your mother—she didn't come up to your uncle's with you?" he ventured, eyeing the boy closely.

"My mother is in Heaven, Uncle Martin says," answered John, simply. "I never saw her," he added, soberly.

There are some things that will make even a man like Jim Ramsay hesitate to pursue an inquisition into the private affairs of a child. The thought was borne in upon him that here he was, a shrewd and sophisticated, grown man, endeavoring to take advantage of childish innocence, and by apparently kindly questions, to worm something out of the boy which he intended to use to his disadvantage! Faugh! Such methods were almost mean enough to be Teutonic. The thought of it made him sick to his stomach! And he had the further humiliation of feeling that, in some way, the boy was too much for him; he had been balked at every turn.

"I am very sorry to hear that your mother is

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dead," he said, gently, and there was sincerity and sympathy in his tone. He accompanied the words by putting his hand on the boy's shoulder, and the dog made a vicious snap at it, and the hand was quickly withdrawn.

"You ought to give your dog a good whipping when he snaps at people that way!" said Ramsay, with some heat, nettled at the attitude of the animal.

"I guess he doesn't understand," said John, concernedly, and in extenuation of the dog's conduct. "I guess he thought you were trying to hurt me, and he was trying to protect me—because I protected him!" And John put his face down and the dog licked it affectionately.

Ramsay flushed, guiltily. He knew that that was exactly what he had been trying to do! And in his accusing conscience, he had an uncanny feeling that the dog, in his mysterious dog way, had sensed whatever was sinister in his motive. He knew it is given to dogs and other dumb things to know that which is beyond human ken.

"Maybe that's so," he admitted, slowly.

"And I don't believe it 'd be right to whip him, when he just thought he was standing up for me," said John, turning his big, clear, appealing eyes to the man. "I don't believe he'll do it again!"

"No, probably not," said Ramsay.

The remainder of the walk was in silence. "Well,

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John," said Ramsay, "here we are at the bank. I suppose you'll get all dolled up and go to call on Miss Loring to-morrow!" Then he added, smiling, "I don't know as I blame you—mebbe I'll drop in to see her, myself!"

"Do you think it will be all right if I take the dog?" asked John.

"Well," said Ramsay, deliberating with mock gravity, "I don't know—she didn't ask the dog, did she?"

"No," said John, gravely, "she didn't. But—I didn't hear her ask you, either."

Jim Ramsay laid back his head and let out a laugh that brought people to the windows. "I don't remember that she did—that's a fact!" he said, when he got his breath.

And as he went up the bank steps, he turned and looked after John's receding figure. "By Gad!" he muttered, "It must be a great thing to have a boy like that!"

CHAPTER XV

"JOHN," said the Judge, one evening, as they sat on the porch, "how are you coming on with that freckle-crop? Is it going to be a world-beater?"

John smiled: "I guess I've got a few," he said. "I don't suppose I've got a million—yet. After a pause, he added, "I guess Snootey's got two million. He's got so many they lap over on each other."

"Come here and let me count yours," said the Judge, and John rose from the step and stood before him obediently. The Judge looked into the boy's face keenly, and it was obvious that he was not counting the freckles. He felt of the thin arms and the narrow shoulders and was manifestly worried, but he spoke cheerfully.

"Well," he said, "you've done pretty well, considering; and while you aren't quite up to the mark set by Snootey, mebbe you'll catch him, in time, though he's got some natural advantages in the way of being sandy complected. I should say a good coat of tan would do just as well as freckles, and you're making good progress in that direction."

John smiled at the Judge in rather a weary way,

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and the latter put his arm about the boy and drew him to him.

"Does Easter give you enough to eat these days?" said the Judge, with an attempt at humor. "You know, I thought mebbe, when I'm not here, she might try to skimp you a little—she's always kicking about the high cost of things."

John laughed outright: "She gives me more than I can eat!" he exclaimed in a vigorous protest against any aspersion of Easter, however well he understood that the Judge was joking.

"She's all the time trying to get me to eat more. When I'm so full I can't eat another mouthful, she always has something else that she wants me to try. But I can't do it, and then, poor Jim has to 'cl'ar it off,' as she says. He doesn't seem to mind, though," he added, as though glad that Jim didn't have to suffer on account of his own dereliction.

"Hmmm," said the Judge, reminiscently: "She does the same thing to me, but I have to do as she says—Jim doesn't get much of mine! She just makes me eat it, whether I want it or not. Mebbe that 'd be a good plan for you to follow."

"I eat all I can," said John; "more than I want."

"And you keep out of doors about all the time, don't you?" asked the Judge.

"About all the time—but I get pretty tired, sometimes," said the boy, a little wearily.

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"Well," said the Judge, in a satisfied way, and obviously unwilling to worry the boy, "I guess you're doing pretty well. Keep on trying for the tan and the freckles—I'll put a premium on 'em—make it worth your while, if you will."

"I'll keep on trying," said John, "but not for the premium—I don't see what you could give me, anything that I haven't got now!" he added, gratefully.

"Pshaw, pshaw!" said the Judge, deprecatingly. "You just wait and see! I know lots of things a boy'd like to have—and you shall have 'em! How's Sandy getting on these days?" he added, as though anxious to change the subject, and looking down at the dog. At the mention of his name, Sandy wagged his tail, by way of answering for himself, though John corroborated the dog's assurance.

"He's great!" said John. "You ought to see him tackle a rat—he gives 'em a couple of shakes and a flip and tosses 'em in the air and they come down dead. He's a good fighter, too—only he's pretty small. But he'll tackle anything."

"You don't sic him on the other dogs, do you?" asked the Judge.

"No, I never do—but sometimes Jim and Fatty do—just sic him a little," said John.

Sandy knew he was being talked about, for he smiled and wagged the whole last half of himself;

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then he sat down and looked alternately at the Judge and John.

"They just sic him a little, eh?" queried the Judge. "What dogs has he tackled?"

"Oh, a lot of 'em!" said John. "He's had several fights with Bradley's dog and with——"

"Bradley's dog!" exclaimed the Judge. "Why, he's three times as big as Sandy! How did it turn out?"

"Well," hesitated John, "I guess Bradley's dog really won, because Sandy runs after they've been at it a while; but he doesn't ki-yi, and Bradley's dog is pretty well bit up—a good deal more'n Sandy is! Lefty McCarthy says he's game. He holds him up by the tail and he won't holler!"

"Well," said the Judge, "Sandy seems to be going out of his class when he tackles a dog like Bradley's. Looks like he had more courage than he had judgment, don't it?"

"Well, I don't know as you can expect a dog to have very good judgment," said John, his big eyes glowing with loyalty. "He's only a dog, and he seems to like to fight—he'll fight anything! It isn't any use trying to keep him from fighting. I don't like him to fight—but he will. Lefty McCarthy says he's part Irish terrier and the rest of him is just dog. He says it's the Irish in him that makes him want

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to fight. Lefty's Irish and he's a good fighter, too. Does everything that's Irish want to fight?"

"Well," admitted the Judge, "the Irish have been considered—er—combative—by some. While I wouldn't want to say that they go 'round looking for it, exactly, I don't believe I ever knew very many who were anxious to *avoid* a fight. You say that Lefty's a good fighter?"

"Oh, yes! He can lick anybody—unless it is Jim," qualified John. "Fatty says Jim's 'bad medicine.'"

"Why, Lefty's bigger than Jim—can't he lick Jim?"

"It seems not," said John. "He hit Jim, one time, and Jim pulled out a razor and run Lefty clear home. Lefty was pretty scared, and he wouldn't come 'round until we all told him we wouldn't let Jim cut him, and we told Jim we wouldn't let Lefty hit him."

"Hmmm," said the Judge. "Sort of a League of Nations, eh? That plan seems to work all right, eh?"

"Yes," said John, a little doubtfully, "I guess it'll work as long as Jim's got the razor. I'm afraid if Jim didn't have the razor, Lefty'd hit him anyway—I think it's the razor Lefty's afraid of, not us." After a moment's sober thought, he added,

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"I don't know how we could stop 'em if they once got started—you see they're both in our gang."

The Judge laughed softly to himself: "And you don't think that this league of yours would make the world entirely safe for Jim, eh?"

"Well," said John, meditatively, "I think—if I were Jim—I'd just as leave keep the razor."

"Did Lefty ever hit you?" asked the Judge.

"He was going to, once, but he was scared of Sandy—Sandy'd 'a' bit him," said John.

The Judge smiled and thought for a moment.

"I see," he said. "Jim's got the razor and you've got Sandy. Pretty much the same thing, eh?"

"Yes, sir," said John.

Sandy, who had apparently been listening to the talk, scratched himself with his hind leg and made a thumping noise on the porch. The Judge looked at him: "Sandy seems to have company," he said.

"He's got *lots* of fleas," said John, sympathetically. "They bother him awful. Fatty says the thing to do is to put poison all over him—some kind of stuff that kills cockroaches and things—and then take him 'round where Bradley's dog is. The poison will kill the fleas, and if Bradley's dog bites Sandy, it will kill Bradley's dog, too. But—I don't just like to do that," added John, dubiously. "Fatty's trying to get some poison at Bradley's store

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—but Bradley watches him every time he goes in there.”

“Good Land!” exclaimed the Judge. “You mustn’t do that! In the first place, Sandy probably’d lick the poison off himself, and then ‘Good-by Sandy!’ You tell Fatty that I said not to do that.”

“Yes, sir,” said John, dutifully.

“And you say that Jim’s still got the razor—carries it about with him, all the time?” asked the Judge.

“Yes, sir,” answered John. “He says he ain’t taking any chances on us stopping Lefty if he starts. He says he feels safer with ‘General Pershing’ in his pocket—he calls the razor ‘General Pershing.’”

“Hmmm,” mused the Judge. “Jim and France are a good deal alike. You tell Lefty and Jim to come down to my office to-morrow—I want to see ’em. Mebbe I can fix up an armistice or a disarmament—or something. Now you run off to bed and get ready for a hard day at freckle-collecting to-morrow! I think it will be a good day for that business.”

John kissed the Judge good-night, affectionately, and turned and started toward the door, and Sandy got up and followed at his heels.

“Does Sandy sleep with you—fleas and all?” asked the Judge.

“He sleeps at the foot of my bed,” said John.

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"What does Easter think about it?"

"Well," said John, "Easter didn't like it at first; but she thinks it's all right, now. Sandy nearly bit her when she tried to put him out."

"Sandy appears to be quite a dog," said the Judge, "and I guess it won't do any harm to allow him a few privileges. By the way," he added, "if he's Irish, why do you call him Sandy? Sandy's Scotch."

"We decided to call him 'Sandy' because he's got sand—he's gritty," said John.

"Oh," said the Judge. "Now I understand. That's a very good reason. Good-night, John—and Sandy!"

After John and Sandy had gone into the house, the Judge sat for a long time, thinking soberly. Finally he rose and started to pace up and down the porch, his hands clasped behind him. And it was midnight before he went in.

The practice of medicine in Spring Valley was conducted and exemplified by "Old Doc. Peevy." As far as any one could remember, he had always been "Old Doc. Peevy"; if he ever had a youth—which is improbable—it had been spent somewhere else. He was a large and ponderous person, and he maintained, at all times, a most solemn and owl-like mien, coupled with a leave-it-to-me-and-it'll-be-all-

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right expression. He was entirely bald, but the absence of hair on the top of his head was more than compensated by a most luxuriant growth of whiskers at the bottom of it, his upper lip being shaven.

The length and density of his whiskers made it unnecessary for him to wear a collar and cravat—at least, as far as anybody's being able to see it is concerned—and he seldom failed to avail himself of this opportunity to discard those usual articles of dress. On Sundays and state occasions, he made the concession of putting on a collar without the cravat—a washable, celluloid collar, one inch in height, and described by the advertisement as “nifty.” At all times he wore a long linen duster that came almost to his heels.

Doc. Peevy's equipment for the practice of medicine consisted of his sign, his whiskers, his regulation ramshackle “horse-an'-buggy,” and a large quantity of calomel and salts. He gave the impression of being a most thorough diagnostician, and his mode of procedure was invariable. He would solemnly take the patient's hand and pull out a huge silver watch; and after a moment, would say, “Hmmm,” indicating that although the malady was most serious, he knew just what to do, and that there was no occasion for alarm now that he had the case in hand. Then he would prescribe calomel and salts. The patient might have a broken leg or a boil on the

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neck, it was all the same to the Doc. Sick people used to send down to Bradley's and get calomel and salts while they were waiting for Doc. Peevy to come. And it is astonishing how much the human system will stand; usually, the invalid recovered in spite of anything the Doc. could do to prevent. However, people have the doctor-calling habit, and that is probably the reason for Doc. Peevy and others like him. Perhaps the feeling that one wants to do everything possible accounts for it.

There was really nothing mean or disagreeable about the man; he was simply a bland and somewhat benign old fellow that blundered around among folks, keeping Nature working overtime to undo his ministrations.

"Doc.," said the Judge, as he met that gentleman on the street the next morning after his talk with John on the porch, "I wish you'd drop in at my house this evening and look over that boy of mine. Don't let him know you are there professionally, for I don't want to have him think he's sick. It might worry him. Just size him up and see what you think about him."

"What seems to be the trouble with him—eatin' green apples er somethin'?" asked the doctor.

"No, 't isn't anything like that," said the Judge; "just seems to be all run down and mighty thin and peaked. I'm getting worried about him. I think

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probably he needs a tonic of some kind. You look him over and see what you think."

"All right," said the Doc. "I'll drop 'round. Seems t' be a power o' sickness 'mong children lately. Can't 'count fer it—'less it's green apples an' sech. Bradley's run out o' calomel, but he looks fer some in on the noon train."

"I don't believe you'll need any calomel for the boy, Doc.," said the Judge, doubtfully. "It doesn't seem to be a case that requires that, to my way of thinking."

"Well, I dunno," answered the doctor, stroking his whiskers and gathering up the lines. "Calomel's good fer a sight o' things. We'll see, we'll see! Gid-dap!" and he rattled away in the ramshackle "horse-an'-buggy."

That evening, the doctor drove up to the house and joined the Judge and John on the porch. "Hello, Doc.," said the Judge, cheerily. "Glad to see you! Have a seat. You know my boy, John, don't you?"

"Oh, yes," said the doctor, "I've saw him 'round quite consider'ble. How'd'y do, John? Don't seem like you look right well."

"Oh, ho! John's all right, Doc.!" said the Judge, winking and shaking his head at the man. "John's doing fine! As soon's he gets a few more freckles

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and a little flesh on him, he'll be a buster! John's all right!"

"Well, come here, John, an' let's hev a look at ye, an' I'll see ef y' are. Y' don't look none too good t' me," said the doctor, placidly ignoring all of the Judge's signs and signals. John came over to the doctor a little reluctantly, and the doctor took his little thin hand in his and pulled out the inevitable watch. Sandy got up and went over by John to see that everything was all right, evidently looking on the doctor with suspicion. A pat from John assured him, however, and he sat down and viewed the proceeding judicially.

"My sakes!" exclaimed the doctor, as he felt the thin wrist, "y' ain't got no flesh 't all on ye, hev ye?"

The Judge fumed inwardly, but outwardly he was cheerful and did his best to repair the damage. "Oh, John'll have plenty of flesh pretty soon! Just a little more of the outdoors and the sun, and he'll pick up!" And then he added, as though he might have made an admission, "He's all right *now*, too—y' see he's growing fast! He'll be pretty tall when he gets his growth! A six-footer, probably!"

"Well, I dunno," said the Doc., letting go John's hand and putting away the watch, "I dunno's I'd say he was very rugged, jes' now. Seems t' hev some fever. Lemme see yer tongue." The doctor could

no more have departed from his stereotyped routine than he could have flown.

John opened his mouth and exhibited that member obediently, and the doctor looked at it sagely: "Tongue's co'ted, jes 's I expected. I reckon, Judge, 't this here boy better hev some calomel an' salts, 'bout's quick 's y' c'n git 'em."

John looked appealingly at the Judge.

"Well, I don't reckon that way, myself," said the Judge, rising from his chair and taking out his wallet, "but I'm going to pay you for your call"; and he handed the Doc. a dollar bill. "I guess that'll be all, this evening, Doc. Much obliged to you for dropping in."

"Calomel an' salts is good fer a sight o' things," said the doctor, as he prepared to leave, having a vague consciousness that the Judge had, in some way, ended the call for him. "Might bleed him a little, 'f he don't show no improvement. Blisterin' helps some, too—in some cases," he added, seemingly that he might be considered to have given a full dollar's worth of advice.

"All right, Doc.," said the Judge. "I'll let you know when I want you again. Good night!"

Sandy looked relieved as the doctor took his departure, and could not forego a muffled "Woof," which said, very plainly, "Thank goodness! That's over! I don't like him."

CHAPTER XVI

AFTER the doctor had gone, John turned his big, wondering eyes on the Judge. "I guess he thinks I'm pretty sick, don't he?" asked the boy. "But I hope I won't have to take calomel and salts—they made me awful sick once!" he added, apprehensively.

"Don't you worry about calomel and salts or any of those things!" said the Judge assuringly, putting his arm around the boy. "You don't have to take anything of the kind. You aren't sick—that's just a way Doc. Peevy has—he thinks everybody's sick! It's his business—I guess, to make 'em think so. But he can't fool us!"

"May be he was right," said John. "I don't feel very well, but I didn't want to bother you about it. I feel pretty tired most of the time. I guess, tho', I'll be all right."

"Sure, you will!" assured the Judge. "A good sleep is what you want more'n anything else. Now you and Sandy run off to bed—want me to go up with you?"

"No, thank you, Uncle Martin," said John. "I'll be all right."

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John and Sandy had scarcely gone into the house, when the gate opened. Deacon Amos Pillsbury, accompanied by Mrs. Higgins and Miss Elvira Shumway, came up the walk to the porch. The Judge greeted them civilly, and brought out chairs from the house. The trio, evidently a committee or delegation of some kind, seated themselves gingerly on the edges of the chairs, with that unmistakable air of embarrassment that almost always presages the launching of an unpleasant subject. They looked from one to the other in a way that suggested that the other begin. Finally, Deacon Pillsbury cleared his throat with a preparatory "Ahem."

"Jedge," he said, in an irresolute and half apologetic way, "we come to see you 'bout this here boy o' your'n."

"Yes?" answered the Judge, lifting his eyebrows and shoving himself a little further out in his chair. "What about him?"

"I don't know's I know jest how to put it," and he looked helplessly at the two other members of the committee, who sat very prim and straight in their chairs, with grim faces and thin-lipped mouths tightly drawn.

"Go on, Deacon Pillsbury," said Mrs. Higgins, sharply; "it's your duty as a deacon in th' church an'

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a respectable member o' th' c'mun'ty to speak right out!"

"Waal," continued the deacon, half-heartedly, and with the air of a man who had let himself in for something that he wished he was out of, "I s'pose 't is. Th' fact is, Jedge, the's a feelin' 'mong th' church people thet they're entitled t' know more'n what they do 'bout this here boy you brung int' our midst—where he come from an' who he is—an' all that. An' we, as respectable members o' this c'mun'ty come here to talk t' you 'bout him, there bein' some suspicion 't he's of question'ble parentage."

During this recital, the Deacon took good care to keep his eyes averted from the Judge's face, and seemed glad when he had finished. The Judge made no reply, and Mrs. Higgins took up the cudgels.

"Yes, an' what's more," she said with decision, "we don't propose t' 'low th' moral tone o' this c'mun'ty t' suffer on account o' him—ef he's what we got reasons fer b'leevin' he is."

Having delivered this, Mrs. Higgins shut her jaws with a snap and fairly bristled with virtuous aggressiveness. The Judge did not reply at once, but his gnarled fingers took a tighter grip on the arms of the chair and his eyes narrowed to slits. "And just what is it that you believe him to be?" he asked.

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"Wal," said Miss Shumway, with a great show of maidenly modesty, "we b'leeve him to be jest what Deacon Pillsbury said—thet his parents was mebbe question'ble, an' 't he ain't a proper person t' be received in our midst. We don't want no contaminatin' influence in this c'mun'ty."

"What's his parents got to do with what he is himself?" asked the Judge.

"Well! I never heard the like!" said Mrs. Higgins, in astonishment. "*We* think parents has got somethin' to do with it ef *you* don't!"

"You don't think anybody can be all right if the parents weren't all right—is that it?" queried the Judge.

"I certainly don't!" said Mrs. Higgins, with asperity. "An' besides, Martin Peabody, you know what we mean."

The Judge thought for a moment, and then he said:

"I have a fairly good record in the community; doesn't my guarantee—my warrant—that he is a fine boy carry any weight with it?"

"That's got nuthin' to do with it, Martin Peabody," snapped Mrs. Higgins, "an' you know it!"

"Well," said the Judge, "I should *think* it would have; but if it hasn't, let me tell you one or two things about the boy himself—just what kind of a boy he is. He is one of the gentlest, sweetest char-

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acters that it has ever been my privilege to know. He's as honest and truthful as the day is long—I don't believe he'd tell a lie to save his life. He is polite and well-mannered, and he's grateful and appreciative of anything you do for him. He is kindly and considerate, and he will sacrifice his own comfort or advantage, any time, for some one else. He's gentle and humane—he can't bear to see any one or any thing suffer. He picked a little homely, forlorn, homeless yellow dog out from under the wheels of an automobile, the other day, and brought him here and cared for him, and the dog won't leave his side a minute. He spends most of his time doing kind things for somebody. He's fair and just in all his dealings with the other boys, and they recognize it, and they have him decide their differences because they know he's square. He isn't loud or boisterous or mischievous—not half as much as I wish he was! He's just a lovable, honorable, simple soul—a *child*—without a mean trait or a bad thought. What is there about him that's goin' to contaminate anybody?"

The Deacon was the first to speak. "Waal," he said, clawing his whiskers and pursing up his lips, "th' folks in th' church—'specially th' wimmen folks—seems t' feel 't he ain't th' right sort o' person t' be associatin' with, an'——"

"Oh, you needn't lay it all to th' wimmen folks,

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Deacon Pillsbury!" interrupted Mrs. Higgins, accusingly. "You was jes' as much he't up 'bout it 's anybuddy! An' as far's contaminatin' 's concerned, Martin Peabody, you know thet a respectable c'm-mun'ty can't afford t' receive no children o' question'ble parentage into its midst 'thout runnin' th' risk o' bein' contaminated."

"And you still think that there is a danger of this community being contaminated by a boy like John, eh?" asked the Judge, in an ominously quiet tone.

"We don't puppose it shall be!" said Miss Shumway, in a watch-dog way.

"And who do you—this delegation or committee—who do you represent?" asked the Judge. "What portion of the community delegated you three to come to see me in this matter?"

"I dunno 's anybuddy reely del'gated us, er asked us to come," said the Deacon, hesitatingly. "We come on account o' th' speech o' people an' th' gen'l feelin' 'bout it."

"And so, when you speak of the community, you mean yourselves, don't you?" questioned the Judge. "The church or any one else didn't hold any meeting and appoint you as a committee—you just appointed yourselves?"

"Waal," admitted the Deacon, "ef you wont t'

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put it that way, I guess that's 'bout it. We decided somebuddy had t' do it—so we come."

"Hmmm!" mused the Judge. "That's about what I thought. And you say that you don't want any boy of questionable parentage in your midst—in the midst of you three? That's it, isn't it?"

"The's others," said Mrs. Higgins, acidly, "ef they had th' courage t' speak their mind!"

"All right," said the Judge, sitting up, and snapping his jaws together. "Let's examine this matter of 'questionable parentage' a little. 'Questionable' means that there is a doubt about it—may be good or may not, you agree to that, don't you?"

"I s'pose so," said the Deacon, slowly.

"But if a person's parents are unquestionably *bad*, then that person has no standing whatever in the community—that's what you say, isn't it?"

"Yes, that's jest what we say!" said Mrs. Higgins, decidedly.

"Oh, you do, hey?" snapped the Judge. "Well, you listen to me! I've lived in Spring Valley for fifty years, and I come pretty near knowing everybody and his parents. If you want to go into a little family hist'ry and pedigree, I'm willin'! What about your parents, Amos Pillsbury?"

The Deacon sat up straight and tried to speak, but the Judge headed him off. "I'll tell you about 'em! You don't consider they were any very great

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ornament to the community, do you? I don't know much about your mother—she run off with another man because no livin' human bein' could stand bein' near such a low-down skunk as your father was! She was probably the most decent person in all your tribe! And she left you to be brought up under your father's gentle care and guidance and example! And he was known all over the county as the meanest cheat and skin in six states! And he died in the penitentiary—didn't he? In the penitentiary, where he was servin' time for perjury in a law-suit about some land that he was tryin' to grab from a widow-woman! There wa'n't nuthin' *questionable* about him, was there? Not a question in the world! And I can't see that the breed has improved much—you're just as bad—only you ain't got the courage to be a regular, out-and-out thief, like he was—but you're a cheat and a skin, in a sly, underhanded way, and everybody knows it! And you're afraid o' gettin' contaminated, hey?"

The Deacon sat dazed and stupefied in his chair and seemed unable to think of any fitting rejoinder, just then, and the Judge turned on Mrs. Higgins.

"And your father drank himself to death—didn't he, Mrs. Higgins? For years, he was known as the town bum—a sot, that had to be picked up out of the gutter and carried home, where he'd beat his wife

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—your mother! And when the town authorities sent him to the inebriate's home, I guess you forgot that time and again I sent provisions over to your house to keep you and your mother from starvin' to death while your Pa was brushin' snakes off himself and dodgin' pink elephants up t' the asylum. And when he come out, he stayed sober just long enough for me to get him a job—and that's all. An' then he stole from his employer, an' I made good the loss! And if you remember, after he'd beat up your mother so bad she didn't get out o' bed for weeks, he had to leave town quick to avoid wearin' some tar-and-feathers that the boys had fixed up for him. And he died in the gutter up to Syracuse, like the hog he was, after all! Nuthin' very *questionable* about him, either, was there?"

Miss Shumway rose hastily: "Well, I don't pup-pose to set here an' be insulted, 'f you folks do!" she declared, moving off with as much dignity as her haste permitted.

"If the truth's an insult," said the Judge, "I can't help it; and I guess by the way you're scurryin' away you know what I was goin' to say. And as for you two," he continued, turning again to the Deacon and Mrs. Higgins, "I'd be willin' to set aside your 'questionable parentage' and take you for what you are yourselves—and I guess the town felt the same

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way. But I guess you've both have lived up to family traditions. If either of you two will tell me of one decent, kindly, humane thing you've done in ten years, I'll discuss this 'contaminatin'' a little further with you. But you *can't*! And you know it! You haven't got one honorable hair in your head, Pillsbury. There ain't a man in this county that'd take your word for five cents, or trust you around the corner! And if you've done anything else, Mrs. Higgins, than to poke your nose into other people's business and go 'round and try to injure somebody's reputation with a lot of malicious gossip and contemptible lies, then I haven't heard about it, and it isn't generally known. I guess either of you is pretty safe as far as bein' contaminated by that boy's concerned!" The Judge lifted a warning finger as the Deacon and Mrs. Higgins started away: "And furthermore——"

The Judge was just getting in form to tell the Deacon and Mrs. Higgins a few things—but they didn't wait to hear them.

When they had gone he shut the front door with a bang. "Of all the damned hypocrites!" he said aloud. He took the lamp from the hall table and went slowly up the stairs. Coming to the door of John's room, he stopped and listened; then he opened the door softly and entered the room. He tip-toed over to the bed, and stood looking down tenderly at

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the sleeping boy, the lamp shaded by his hand. He started and looked closed at the white, pinched face—there was a bright red spot on the pillow where John's lips lay against it!

CHAPTER XVII

NEXT day, things began to happen in the Peabody home. John's condition was such as to warrant action. He was a very sick boy.

Dr. Graham, the big specialist from New York, turned away from John's bed and linked his arm into the Judge's and led him from the room with gentle compulsion. Sandy remained at his post beside the bed.

"Well, Doctor, what do you think?" asked the Judge anxiously, his eyes studying the specialist's face intently. The latter shifted his arm to the Judge's shoulder and slowly shook his head.

"Judge," he said, in a low tone, "he hasn't a chance. It's tuberculosis, of course, and in a fearfully acute form. He may live a month—at the outside—or he may die to-night—any time he has a hemorrhage."

The Judge clutched the doctor's arm convulsively: "God!" he gasped. "Don't tell me that! Don't tell me that!"

"I can't tell you anything different, and be truthful," said the doctor with a deep sympathy in his voice, and grasping the lawyer's hand.

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"Oh, why didn't I call you before!" wailed the Judge. "Why did I not see all this coming! I shall never forgive myself for not——"

"It wouldn't have made the slightest difference," said the doctor, in a way that carried conviction. "The boy was marked from the beginning—he never did have a chance after the disease got a start—enough of a start to be detected. You have nothing to blame yourself for."

"Isn't there *anything* that I can do—that *somebody* can do?" asked the Judge, desperately. "Can't I take him somewhere—*anywhere*? I'll take him to the North Pole, if you think it might help him! I'll do anything under the sun—never mind the money, I'll get that somewhere!"

Dr. Graham shook his head gravely: "There isn't a thing you can do! He's better off here than anywhere else; in fact, it would probably kill him to move him. I never saw a more hopeless case."

The Judge sank into a chair and covered his face with his hands. After a moment, he raised his eyes: "Doctor," he began hesitatingly, placing a hand upon the doctor's knee, "you have been very good to come up here—and I know that you are the biggest man in New York—but—would you mind—if——"

"Certainly not, Judge! I wouldn't mind at all!" said the doctor. "If it will make you feel any bet-

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ter, you just pick out the man you want, and I'll send him up here. How would Lawrence do—he's the best man I know?"

"It isn't that I haven't confidence in you, Doctor," said the Judge, apologetically; "it's just the feeling that maybe *somebody* can do *something*! All I want is the next best man to you."

"You shall have a better one!" said Graham, as he bade the Judge good-by.

The Judge went back to John's bedside. All through the afternoon and through the long night, he and Sandy stayed with the boy, and Easter waddled in and out, with noiseless tread, and looked after the three of them. And ever was there a cheerful look and a happy smile upon their faces—that is, on the faces of all but Sandy—he was plainly worried and did not understand it at all. He would look up into the Judge's face in a puzzled, querulous way that said, as plain as words could say, "I don't know what it's all about, but I *do know* that something's wrong. My dog's love for John tells me that! I wish I could do something to help him, and possibly I can. At any rate, I'm going to lie right here, within call, all summer, if necessary! And you can bet, that if there *is* anything I can do, I'll be right here on the job!"

And when the Judge would answer Sandy's mute, questioning face with an assuring smile, Sandy

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would thump his tail on the floor as an expression of thanks and appreciation, and resume his patient watch.

The next day, Dr. Lawrence came, and he only confirmed what Dr. Graham had said. And then, it was up to the Judge and Easter and the boys to just wait for the end, and to make John's little, brief day on earth as happy as they could.

Mornings, the boys filed in—Fatty and Snootey and Lefty McCarthy and Jim, and were met by Easter in the hall and given whispered instructions.

“Yo’ all ’spec’ yo’ ’s gwine in dar lookin’ like a fun’al?” she said, as she looked at their lugubrious faces. “Does yo’ all ’spec’ t’ set dar like yo’ ’s on de mo’nah’s bench at de ’vival? Yo’ all looks like a flock o’ dyin’ ducks! Dat ain’t gwine do John no good! Yo’ all gwine in dar fo’ *his* pleasur’, not yo’r’n—don’ fergit dat! Act up gay! Da ’s de ticket! Tell ’im yo’ all jes’ settin’ ’roun’ waitin’ fer him t’ git well so’s yo’ kin hav’ sum fun! Ef yo’ all don’ puffo’m like I tol’ yo’, I’m gon’ tak’ mah fis’ an’ bust yo’ one when yo’ all come out!”

Thus admonished, the boys marched into the sick room. John and the Judge and Sandy received them with delight, and they arranged themselves about the bed, and started in to “act up gay.” Each tried to out-do the other in commendable and cheering mendacity.

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"Us five's gonna be a baseball nine, soon's you get well," said Fatty. "We 'lected you pitcher an' cap'n."

"That'll be fun," said John, weakly, but with enthusiasm; "but don't you think Lefty ought to be pitcher—he can pitch lots better 'n I can? And I don't know about being captain—you're all better players than I am."

"Who? Lefty?" scoffed Jim, in derision. "Nos-sah! He can't git nuthin' on de ol' ball lik' whut yo' kin! (Jim had a relative who worked in the barber-shop, and thus had access to the pink sporting-papers and was well read in baseball parlance.) Jim shook his head in firm and expert denial: "Nos-sah! Lefty might hav' mo' smoke when de ol' soup-bone's workin' good, but yo' done use de ol' noodle. Lefty solid iv'ry! Yo' done pitch wid de brains—keep 'em guessin' an' mixin' 'em up. Lefty got nuthin' but a li'l speed an' a prayer. Lefty can't hol' a can'le t' whut yo' gwine be when yo' gits well—mebbe 'bout t'morro'."

Under any other circumstances, such sentiments as this would undoubtedly have resulted in a job for the local League of Nations, as Lefty McCarthy would never have allowed Jim to "get away with" any such talk, razor or no razor. But now, Lefty swallowed hard and rose manfully to the occasion:

"Surest t'ing y' know!" said Lefty. "Jim's got

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me right! I wisht I had de nut on me you got! You gotta do th' hurlin' an' I'll ketch—'f ya' don't burn 'em over too fast!"

"Well," said John, hesitatingly, "I'll do my best—but I still think that Lefty's a better pitcher."

"An' say," said Snootey, who had determined, after a struggle with himself, to sacrifice his most cherished possession on the altar of love for his pal, "I'm goin' t' give yo' my 'pendix in th' bottle o' alc'hol down to th' Judge's offus! Y' c'n have her right here an' look at her, all the time. I'll beat it down there an' get 'er right now, 'f you say so?"

John thought that perhaps it would be just as well not to break up the party, even for so wonderful a gift as the "'pendix," and that it would do when he came next time. "Besides," said John, "it's *your* 'pendix—I wouldn't want to take it."

"Shucks!" said Snootey, "I'd jes' as leave you had 'er."

Not to be outdone, Lefty also made an offering

"Yes, an' I'm gonna learn yuh t' box, soon's yuh git husky," he said. "I'll show yuh how t' upper-cut a guy when he's comin' inta yuh, an' how t' giv' 'im th' elbow an' de scissors punch, an' all like dat!" And Lefty vigorously illustrated the blows on an imaginary opponent in a manner that would make Mr. Dempsey sit up and take notice. "The'

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won't no rough-neck have nuthin' on you—yuh c'n go to de mat wid any of 'em!"

"Ya'as, ma'am!" said Jim, in endorsement; "an' ef dat ain't nuff, Ah's gwine 'low yo' to tote 'Gen'l Pershing'—have 'im on de hip all de time! Den yo' ain't gotta take no lip f'um *nobuddy*!" And then he added, with, perhaps, the very slightest of looks at Lefty, "Long's yo' got dat li'l ol' razzah in yo'r jeans ain't *nobuddy* gwine say nuthin' to yuh!"

"And oh, say!" broke in Fatty, "Bradley's dog is dead! Sandy c'n go past there now 'thout gittin' all chawed up! Jim fixed him!"

Jim bore his honors meekly, and acknowledged the compliment with a grin in which he exhibited two glistening rows of very white teeth.

"Did you, Jim?" asked John, interestedly. "I'm glad for Sandy's sake—and the other dogs—but—I hope you didn't hurt him—much?"

"Ah jes' nacher'ly lay dat scoun'rel low!" grinned Jim, with an air of supreme satisfaction at a deed well performed. "Ya'as, Ma'am! Dat houn'-dawg done spoke out'n his turn fo' de las' time! He done took his las' mou'ful off'n Sandy! Ain't nevah gwine bite *nobuddy*!"

"How did you kill him, Jim?" asked John, a little timidly.

"Bull dawg!" said Jim.

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"What do you mean—bull dog?" asked the Judge, anxiously.

"Ah jes' nacher'ly let 'at houn' mingle wid a bull dawg—da's all! Bull dawg done put de bee on 'im somep'n scan'l'us! Zam! All ovah!" And Jim waved his hand in a manner that indicated that there "was nothing to it" at all.

"Where did you get a bull dog?" asked the Judge, a little puzzled.

"Miss Ru'f," said Jim, laconically. "Ah done borry her dawg. Da's whar Ah got 'im."

"What are you talking about?" asked the Judge, in astonishment. "Do you mean to tell me that you went and borrowed Miss Ruth Loring's bull dog to kill Bradley's dog with?"

"Nossah! Not 'zac'ly. Ah jes' borry 'im t' take fer walk—da's all. Miss Ru'f driv' down t' de pos'-offus, an' de dawg 's settin' in de cyah. Miss Ru'f say, 'Mornin', Jim,' an' Ah 'sponds de time o' day. 'Da's some dawg yo' all got dar,' Ah says; an' she 'sponds, 'Deed he is, but jes' a trifle oncivil t' othah dawgs,' she says. An' dat put de idee in mah haid. 'Please, Ma'am,' Ah says, 'jes' lemme take 'im fo' 'bout fi' minnits—Ah wants t' show 'im t' a cert'n pahty. Ah ain't studyin' 'bout how civil he is.' She say, 'All right, Jim. Be keerful 'bout lettin' 'im bite othah dawgs.' 'Ya'as, Ma'am,' Ah says. Den all Ah done was t' walk de dawg pas' Bradley's.

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Da's all—Bradley's dawg done de res'! Done commit su'cide!" Jim paused a moment. "Miss Ru'f done had dat dawg's numbah when she say he on-civil. Man! Da's de oncivilis' dawg what is! Uuum huumph!" And Jim relapsed into a provoking silence.

"Well, tell us what happened," said the Judge, impatiently.

"Ah done tol' it, ain't I? Sca'cely nuthin' happen—sca'cely nuthin! Ah jes' promenades de bull dawg pas' Bradley's—Bradley's houn' come out an' speak out 'n his turn—dey mingle. Zowie! Oh, Boy! Jes' one grab! Kaz-zam! Curtains! Took Bradley an' six mo' t' pry dat bull dawg loose."

John lay back on the pillows thinking it over. "I'm sorry for Bradley's dog," he said, after a moment, "but I guess he brought it on himself—though I s'pose it was his nature to attack other dogs. He didn't know any better. But it's a good thing for the other dogs."

"Does Miss Loring know about it?" asked the Judge of Jim.

"Yassah! Ah reckon she do. Bradley done recognize de dawg, an' when dey got 'im pried loose, he done took 'im back to de cyah, hisse'f. Ah reckon he was all he't up 'bout it. Ah heared 'em bof splanifyin' huccum de mattah, but Ah didn' wait. Bradley done mak' a grab fo' me, but Ah duck. Ah

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ain' gwine go pas' Bradley's fo' quite a spell. Ah didn' do nuthin'!"

"It's a wonder he didn't say 't was me done it!" said Fatty. "I git the blame fer 'bout ever'thing 'at comes off! Lucky I wasn't 'round!"

The Judge looked at John, and saw that he had fallen asleep, and he motioned to the boys. They rose in a body and tip-toed out, the Judge giving them a half-dollar to divide up.

He stood for a moment at the bedside, looking down at the sleeping boy, and then he went to the door and called softly. Jim came, and the Judge scribbled a hasty message on a scrap of paper and handed it, with a coin, to Jim. "Take that down to the telegraph office and tell Bill Hicks to rush it." Then he added, with a faint smile, as Jim seemed to hesitate, "You won't have to pass Bradley's, you can go in the back way."

The message was addressed to Mr. James Ramsay, Albany, N. Y.

CHAPTER XVIII

It was raining gently but steadily when Ramsay knocked at the door of the Judge's darkened home, late at night. After some delay, the door opened, and the huge form of Easter Sunday confronted him in the doorway, a hint of aggressive opposition in her manner when she recognized him.

"The Judge sent me a telegram to call and see him," said Ramsay, in an almost apologetic way; and after a slight hesitation that was plainly expressive of incredulity, Easter stood aside, and Ramsay entered the hall. The door of the parlor opened, and the figure of the Judge was silhouetted in the dim light of the room behind him. He looked bent and worn and old. He peered at his visitor for a second, and then beckoned:

"Come in, Ramsay," he said, in a low tone, "I want to talk to you a minute."

Ramsay stepped into the room, and the Judge closed the door softly behind him.

A small coffin lay upon two wooden horses at the far end of the room, and the whole scene looked gruesome enough.

Ramsay stood, hat in hand, and his dripping um-

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brella making a puddle on the carpet. He looked about nervously for a place to put the umbrella, but not seeing a suitable one, he continued to hold it, the wetting of the carpet being dwarfed by the obviously portentous situation. The Judge walked over to the coffin, and stood with his hands clasped behind his back, looking down at the boy's face.

Ramsay did not move, but followed him uneasily with his eyes.

"I was calculating to drop in on you, when I heard that the boy was dead," said Ramsay, "and see if there's anything I could do. And then afterwards I got your message, and I came as soon as I could." The Judge did not answer immediately, but continued to gaze into the coffin.

"Come over here, Ramsay," he said, after a time, "and look at this boy." Ramsay shuffled irresolutely to the Judge's side and Sandy, who lay on the floor beside the coffin, growled. But at a word from the Judge, he subsided and Ramsay looked down at the little white face. Its pathos could not have failed to move any one deeply.

After a moment, Ramsay turned his eyes to the Judge: "I'm certainly sorry for you, Judge!" he almost whispered; "he was a fine boy, and I don't wonder that you thought a lot of him. I was attracted to him, myself,—that day, at the picnic, and another time—he seemed such a modest, straightfor-

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ward little chap! Too bad! Too bad!" he added. "Now if there's anything I can do——" he broke off with a gesture that signified that all the Judge had to do was to ask. He plainly expected an appeal for money.

"Well," said the Judge, not looking up, "I don't know—mebbe, there is—I don't know. Come over into my room," and the Judge led the way across the hall to the room where he had a desk and his books—he never referred to it as "the library," but always as "his room"—and indicated a chair to Ramsay. The latter stood the wet umbrella upon the hearth and sat in the chair with a relieved air, while the Judge fumbled among some papers on the desk.

"As I was saying," assured Ramsay, in a conciliatory way, "you and I haven't always got along together very first class, Judge—but at a time like this, if there's anything I can——"

"Not that way, I guess, Ramsay," said the Judge, putting up a staying hand, "I just wanted to talk to you." He arranged some papers on the desk although he was obviously giving them no thought, and then looked at the man opposite to him quickly.

"You said you were attracted to the boy, didn't you, Jim?" asked the Judge, irrelevantly.

"Yes, indeed," hastily admitted Ramsay. "I didn't see him but once or twice, but he impressed

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me as a manly and lovable little chap. I'm mighty sorry for you, Judge—and him, too!"

"You like children, don't you, Ramsay?" asked the Judge.

"Yes, Judge, I do—I honestly like 'em!" Ramsay answered, and there was sincerity in the tone.

"Never had any children of your own, did you?" asked the Judge.

"No," said Ramsay, "you know I'm not married, Judge."

"Yes, that's so," said the Judge. "I never was married myself, and so I never had any either—I wish to God I had been married and had some of my own!" The Judge sat silent for a time: "They say," he went on, "that when a child comes, it brings something with it to its father and mother more than other children have. They say that one's *own* child is something altogether different from other children—and I guess there's no doubt of that being true."

"I suppose it is, Judge," said Ramsay, a trifle puzzled, "I've heard that was so—folks like their own children best—seem to, anyway."

"You used to know a girl by the name of Mary Ashford, didn't you, Jim?" asked the Judge, after a pause, without looking up. Ramsay suddenly sat up straight in his chair and looked intently at the Judge, who seemed to be busy with the papers on

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his desk. He studied the Judge's face for a moment, and then settled back.

"Why—yes,—I believe I did," said Ramsay, as though the name awakened only a very vague memory. "A long time ago, seems to me I did."

"Yes, it was a long time ago that she went away from here," said the Judge, reminiscently; "more than ten years."

"Yes?" said Ramsay, with a slight lifting of the eye-brows, as he took out a cigar and lit it—Ramsay without a cigar gave the impression of being disarmed. "What about her?"

"You don't remember her going away—don't remember her going down to New York?" the Judge asked, as though it was a matter of little moment.

"Yes, I believe I do remember, now that you speak of it," he said, as he pretended to inspect his cigar, but glanced keenly at the Judge from under the narrowed eyelids. "Didn't she have some trouble—or something?"

"She had her share of trouble, I guess," said the Judge, with conviction. "Mebbe a little more'n her share—more than was coming to her, anyway."

"I didn't know about it," said Ramsay; and then he asked, as though he thought the subject were about exhausted, "I don't think I ever heard what became of her—did she die, or anything?"

"Oh, yes, she died," answered the Judge, in a

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matter of fact way, "wanted to, I guess—right after her baby was born. You see, she was alone in the world—deserted and among strangers—practically friendless. I guess she didn't care a great deal about living."

Ramsay looked hard at his cigar: "You say—she had—a baby?"

"Yes," said the Judge. "She didn't have any husband, and the baby didn't have any father. Kind of a tough situation for both of 'em! You see, people don't, as a rule, flock around and open their arms and their hearts to that kind of a pair."

Ramsay looked steadily at his cigar, but his hand shook.

"And what became of the baby?" he asked hoarsely.

"The baby? He's there in the coffin in the next room," said the Judge.

Ramsay dropped his cigar and clutched the arms of his chair. "Judge," he gasped, "you don't mean to say——" He stopped, aghast.

"Yes," said the Judge, quietly, "that's just what I mean to say. That is your own boy in there, Jim!"

"My God!" the man whispered, his face white and his eyes staring. "You knew—all about——"

"Oh, yes," said the Judge, a little wearily. "I've known all about it for ten years. That's the reason

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I used to make trips to New York, every once in a while. You have joked me about them often."

"And you never let on—or told——"

"No, I couldn't. Why should I?" asked the Judge. "You see, after you took her down to New York and left her, and didn't answer any of her letters——"

"I never got a letter from her in my life!" protested Ramsay.

"Yes, I know it—they were all returned to her. I have them here." The Judge paused and looked pityingly at Ramsay. "I guess you didn't really want to get any, for you went away—to Mexico, your friends said,—and didn't leave any forwarding address. Well, anyhow, when she didn't hear from you, and things were pretty desperate with her, she wrote to me and asked me to help her. God knows she needed help! And, some way, she figgered I would. Well, I tried to—I tried to find you, but you know what a chance I had. I went down to the city and saw her—she was in a Magdalen hospital, and her baby had just been born. I've got all the records and papers here, if you want to see 'em," he said, holding some documents. "It was her deathbed, too; but I got there a little before she died. I saw how matters stood—they told me she couldn't live an hour—and I smoothed her way across as much as I could. I told her that you were

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dead—and I guess you were, weren't you—dead to every decent thing—and that you had died wanting to come to her and claim her and make such reparation as was in your power. And she believed me. And when she closed her eyes she was happy in the hope that when she opened them, on the Other Side, may be, if God was good and forgave her, she would look into your eyes again."

Ramsay groaned and buried his face in his hands. The Judge rose and paced the room, keeping his face averted from the man.

"I promised her that I would take care of the boy—as though he were my own, as far as I could—that I'd give him a chance to be somebody in the world, and that nobody would ever know, from me, that he—hadn't any father. And I've kept my word."

"Why didn't you tell me?" groaned the man. "Why didn't you tell me while he was alive? Oh, if I had only known!"

"I did try," said the Judge. "I made up my mind when I saw that you had taken a fancy to him, at the picnic. But he took sick right afterwards, and I tried to get word to you, but you were off on one of your gum-shoe expeditions; and when, at last, the word got to you, you came too late."

Ramsay shook with sobs—genuine and unsimulated, but the Judge set his face hard and went on,

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cold: "I took care of him for ten years in an institution—not a pauper asylum, but a fairly comfortable home—and when I figgered he was old enough, I brought him here—but I guess I bungled it a little—I ought to have prepared the Pharisees of this town with a little propaganda about a dead relative, or something—for the boy's sake, I mean—I don't give a hoot about myself!

"But it made me sick at heart to see these miserable shams, these one-day-a-week Christians, pull away their skirts from him as though he were pollution! Why, a delegation of snivelin' hypocrites came to me and asked me to explain him—give 'em chapter and verse—who and what he was and all about him! Said they had to be careful who they were takin' into their midst! They had the *nerve*—yes, by God, they did—when I knew, all the time, what a miserable lot of whited sepulchers they were, and they *knew* that I knew it! I told 'em that I guessed I'd stand on my record in the village; that they ought to know me pretty well, by now, and that I'd vouch for the boy. But it seems that that wasn't enough. And then, I got hot and opened up and told 'em a few things—recited a little of their personal and family history to 'em, and I guess most of it wasn't very pleasant to hear, and I guess, meb-be, I said some things I shouldn't. But it riled me to think that one breath from a no-account, med-

dlin', evil-minded busy-body that had no standing in the community, could blow down the good reputation that a man had spent fifty years in building up, or could blight a young and innocent boy's future. And I showed 'em the gate."

The Judge paused; but Ramsay still sat with his face in his hands. The Judge glanced at him, a look of pity crossing and softening his face, and then went on:

"They didn't like the way I talked, I guess, for it was pointedly intimated to me that I might as well be absent from church—and the boy, too! Seeing as I don't go very often, I told them that I didn't believe that would be any very great hardship—though I had always supposed that the church was for the reclamation of sinners—they evidently considered the boy and me to be such—rather than for the further purification of the perfect. I couldn't figger out what the boy had done, anyhow! He was about the cleanest, whitest-souled thing that God Almighty ever put on earth! How he was goin' to contaminate Joe Belcher and Old Pillsbury and Mrs. Higgins and—Abner Judd—he was very set against the church admittin' the boy to its midst! Think of it! Why—but I guess that'll be about enough of that!"

The Judge stopped and walked over near to Ramsay. "I thought it was coming to you, Jim, to hear

the truth—I thought it might do you some good—and it seems to have made a small dent in the shell of your selfishness, anyway. And mebbe a little more won't hurt you. I wanted you to realize what you've lost—mebbe I'm only appealing to your selfishness now. To feel what you've missed by not playin' square. I don't believe that you've been very happy when you thought of that girl—no man can be so hardened as not to have his conscience hurt him when he does a trick like that."

"Don't, Judge! For God's sake, don't make it any harder!" pleaded Ramsay, deeply moved.

But the Judge was inexorable: "Do you believe that you have had a happier and more satisfactory life than you would have had if you had played the game fair? Don't you think that if you and Mary Ashford had been married and you had cherished and protected her, as you should have done, and this beautiful boy had come, as he would have, and he would have been *yours*—yours to guide and develop and love and be proud of—don't you think that, mebbe, you would have had fully as happy a life as the one you chose instead? And how about her and the boy—they'd have been better off, too, I guess. Don't you know that one of the greatest things in life is to watch and help the mind of a child develop—you *must* know it, for I know that you like children—and because you do like them

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is, perhaps, the one reason why I've always had a hope that you weren't altogether a selfish, venal, conniving trickster,—that mebbe there was some spark of decency in you, after all—though God knows my atom of faith in you has had to stand a severe strain a good many times!"

"Don't, Judge! I beg of you—don't!" Ramsay implored, rising and pacing the floor agitatedly, his head sunk on his breast. "I want to make such reparation——"

"You can't make any reparation—now!" said the Judge; "it's too late! Ten years too late, for the girl; and now, too late for the boy!"

"I can acknowledge him! I can give him a name! I——"

"No, you can't!" said the Judge. "Don't you see that anything you did for him now—in that way—would only tend to hurt him! He's got just as good a name as any you can give him—my name!"

"But, Judge," Ramsay began, "I want to——"

A knock on the door caused both men to turn quickly, and before the Judge could make any inquiry, the door opened and Agatha stepped into the room, and Easter Sunday closed the door behind her.

Agatha looked in a startled way at Ramsay: "I did not know that any one was with you, Martin—Easter opened the door for me and I came in hur-

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riedly. I trust you will excuse me, Mr. Ramsay?" Then she turned to the Judge: "I felt that I must see you—we have been friends for too long to let anything make any difference—and I wanted to know if there is anything that I can do?"

The Judge looked at her, almost timidly, and stroked his chin with his thin, gnarled hand: "I don't believe there is anything, Agatha—but I thank you, just the same."

"He was a dear, lovable boy, Martin,—anybody's heart, would go out to him, notwithstanding——" She stopped, and bit her lip, and there were tears in her eyes.

"Yes, Agatha, he was all of that," said the Judge, quietly.

"When is the funeral to be?" she asked; then she added, with a note of decision in her voice that plainly said that she was defying popular opinion, "I am coming!"

"Day after to-morrow," answered the Judge; "I shall be glad if you feel that you can come!"

"Nothing could prevent me!" she said, positively, "And you are sure that there is nothing that I can do?"

"Nothing, Agatha—thank you," said the Judge.

Mrs. Loring turned toward the door, but Ramsay stepped forward: "Just a moment, Mrs. Loring, I want to say just a word." Agatha turned, a

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mild surprise in her eyes, and the Judge made frantic motions at Ramsay to keep his mouth shut; but the man had taken the bit in his teeth and there was no stopping him.

"I want to set you right about a few matters, Mrs. Loring—don't try to stop me, Judge, for I'm going through with it. That boy in there, in the coffin, is mine! Yes—my boy! My own flesh and blood!"

Agatha leaned against the door in amazement, and the Judge, after a few, futile attempts to head Ramsay off, sank into a chair, limply.

"He was mine, by every right!" said he, in tense tones and with squared jaw. "Mine in the sight of God and Man—though I didn't know it till half an hour ago! But now I'm going to claim him—late as it is! He was the son of a girl that I betrayed and deserted—left to die among strangers—and so she would, if it hadn't been for the Judge! For ten years—all the boy's life—this man took care of him, and when the boy's health demanded it, he brought him here! This man was big enough and brave enough to defy popular opinion for the boy's sake! He was willing to bear all the obloquy and mean, contemptible suspicion that a narrow and self-righteous people could think up and fling at him—and keep his mouth shut tight—for the boy's sake! MY boy's sake! This man here was willing to see

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his friends drop away from him—people that had known him for years and yet were too blind to see that the thing *couldn't* be anything else than an act of humanity! And all the while he said—nothing.”

The shaft went home into Agatha's breast, and involuntarily, she took a step toward the Judge! “Martin,” she gasped, “is this true?” But the Judge put his hands wearily over his eyes and did not answer.

“You can bet it's true!” cried Ramsay. “But that isn't all! Here's where *I* take a hand! Before the sun goes down to-morrow, I'm going to let every man, woman, and child in the county know the truth!”

The Judge put up a weak hand in protest, but Ramsay paid no attention to it. “I'm going to do *one* decent thing before I die, if I never do another! I'm going to acknowledge and legitimize that boy before the world, and I'm going to put the Judge right in the sight of man!”

“Don't you see, Jim,” said the Judge, his voice trembling from physical weakness, “don't you see that you *can't* do it? Don't you understand that the records won't——”

“Records? Records—hell!” shouted Ramsay. “Don't tell me what I *can't* do! I've had forgery and perjury committed too long to worry about records! I've had records changed and lost and found

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and inserted for things that weren't a hundredth part as vital as this! *I* know what *I can* do, and I'm going to do it!"

The Judge raised his tired, pleading eyes to them, and then, utterly unable to battle further, he laid his head upon his outstretched arms upon the table, almost in a state of collapse. The door opened, and Easter stood in the doorway. The Judge rose to his feet unsteadily: "You must say nothing of all this, Agatha—I will see you home. It was very good of you to come!"

"Nossah!" said Easter, firmly, "yo' ain' gwine see *nobuddy* home! Yo' is gwine t' baid, da's whar yo' gwine!" Then turning to Agatha she said, "'Scuse me, lady, but de Jaidge ain' bin t' baid fo' 'bout a week 'count o' settin' up an' nu'sin' de boy, an' he jes' nacher'ly clean wo' out!"

"I will see Mrs. Loring home," said Ramsay, "if she cares to accept the escort of a man like me. Then I'll——"

"I wouldn't think of letting either of you go," said Agatha. "There's not the slightest need of it—I came in my car with a chauffeur, and I'm quite all right." And although both men protested, she slipped out of the door.

Easter stood, the picture of immutable decision, holding the door open for the Judge to come, and he complied, helplessly. Ramsay followed him into

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the hall, and stopped, looking at the door to the parlor. The Judge raised his eyes to Ramsay's inquiringly: "What is it, Jim?" he asked.

"If you don't mind," said Ramsay, brokenly, "I'd like to go in there—and spend a little time with—my boy!"

CHAPTER XIX

IN the little, old-fashioned parlor of the Judge's home, were gathered those who had known and loved John Peabody in the brief span of his life that he had spent in Spring Valley, and who were not afraid of "th' speech o' people." Fatty Jennings and Snootey Judd and Lefty McCarthy and Jim were all there officially, as pall-bearers; though their difficult duties were rendered even more difficult by blinding tears. "Sandy was there, too—Jim Ramsay sat up near the coffin with the dog in his arms—and "Sandy" did not growl or snap at Ramsay now. Agatha and Ruth and Alan Bailey sat behind the boys, and back of them were Easter Sunday and Mis's Simpson and Mrs. Abner Judd and the Judge. That was all, except the minister and the undertaker.

The services were very simple—just the few and usual words that mark the end of the chapter and the closing of the book. And then, the little company went with John Peabody to Sunset Hill.

"Sunset Hill," the velvet of whose western slope was glorified by the rays of the descending sun, long after the dusk of twilight had settled upon the vil-

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lage below; and where slept those whose day of life was over, beneath the simple marbles that dotted its verdure.

But O, in that City of The Dead, a strange thing had come to pass—John Peabody was born again! There did he come into his own! And there did the mantle that had been denied him in life, fall upon his frail shoulders in death! There—when all had seemed over and the Book of Life closed—was he lifted from the ignominy that bigots heap upon a nameless child in their efforts to blight his life! Before the open grave, there stood a broken column; and on its base, in letters deeply graven, so that he who runs may read, were the words:

Sacred to The Memory of
JOHN PEABODY RAMSAY
the only child of
JAMES AND MARY ASHFORD RAMSAY
Aged 10 years

O, blessed Perjury! What Truth was ever half so noble as that Lie! And there was no doubt in the Judge's mind, or Agatha's—and maybe, yours and mine—that George Washington, of boasted and immortal veracity, would have liked to come down from Heaven to shake Jim Ramsay's hand!

There it was! No doubt about it! Let smug Self-righteousness and Bigotry come and read it!

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Now, John Peabody was all right! But before? What mattered it that the boy was a beautiful and gentle soul? What mattered it that in him reposed a splendid mind, a love of truth and loyalty and honor and human kindness? What mattered it that in him were tender sweetness and a heart of fine gold? Could his parents, whoever they were, produce a *marriage certificate*?—that was the only thing that *counted*! If the parents couldn't, then these people proposed to see that the boy's life be made as miserable as possible! They would make him an outcast and wreck his life for him for being careless in the selection of his parents! They would "visit the sins of the father" upon this innocent child, and they wouldn't stop at the third and fourth generation, either, if they could help it!

But ah! Glory be! The surviving parent of John Peabody Ramsay *could and did* produce the certified record! No one dreamed of questioning it—that is, after Abner Judd had been injudicious enough to ask Ramsay some questions about it. They told Abner, when he came to, in the hospital, that from the way Jim Ramsay carried on there could be no possible doubt about it! And Abner decided, after he got well, that he wouldn't go into the matter any further.

Now, the sitters at Bradley's store could resume their liquid bombardment of bugs, assured that the

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moral tone of the "c'mun'ty" had not been impaired! Now, flat-chested, cruel-mouthed Spinsterhood could sleep o' nights, secure in the thought that "immercial'ty" had found no lodging in their midst! And the town was greatly relieved to know that, while John Peabody had been a contamination and a menace, John Peabody *Ramsay* was not!

As the sexton cast the last spadeful of earth into the grave and patted down the little mound, Ramsay, who had stood through it all with "Sandy" in his arms, motioned to the Judge to get into the carriage with him.

For a long time, neither spoke; but while the younger man held the little, yellow dog close to his breast, his powerful hand closed over the Judge's thin one; and in this way they arrived at the railroad station where Ramsay was to take the train to his home in Millville. He got out of the carriage and closed the door and started away, but changed his mind and came back. Leaning on the windowsill of the carriage, he said, "Judge, I'd just like to see anybody try to run a damn trolley-line through Sunset Hill now!"

In the days that followed the Death of John Peabody Ramsay, a considerable re-adjustment of relations took place, and many changes came about. Perhaps the most notable of these changes was mani-

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fest in Jim Ramsay. John's death had been a heavy blow to him, driven home, as it was, by what the Judge had said to him, and it seemed to change the man's whole perspective. There could be no doubt that he was much chastened, and that he viewed things in a different light. Whatever there was of kindness in his nature—and there must have been a good deal, all the time—was allowed to come to the surface and manifest itself. He had put away a good deal of his hard exterior, just as a snake sheds his skin; and consideration for others, a trait that formerly had not been conspicuous in his make-up, became more and more manifest. Sandy, John's dog, was Ramsay's inseparable companion now, and that was a straw that showed how the wind blew.

The Judge was very quick to notice the change in the man, and he felt, as the politician became "almost human", that his original estimate was justified—"the atom of faith" that the Judge had in Ramsay on account of his love of children.

Ramsay spent considerable time in the Judge's office, whenever he came to Spring Valley; and while "the sparks flew," at times, yet the two men grew closer and closer together, as each found in the other many things to admire.

"Jim," said the Judge, during one of these visits, "there's a poor, old cuss here in town—Sam Dudley—that's had an almighty long run of hard luck;

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wife died and children sick and he ain't strong and seems to be 'up against it,' pretty much all the time. He ain't the whining kind, and he's deserving and honest as the day is long. Can't you do something for him? My warrant that he's all right goes with him."

Ramsay smiled: "You never ask for anything for *yourself*, do you, Judge?"

"I don't want anything, Jim," said the Judge, smiling. "Mebbe, if I did, I'd ask for it. But how about Dudley?"

"Well, I guess, mebbe, I could fix him up with something—on your account, Judge, I don't know him, myself. How would watchman on the canal suit him—fifty dollars a month in it?"

"Lord! That 'd be a God-send to him!" exclaimed the Judge. "But what would he have to do? You know I said he wasn't very strong."

"Well," said Ramsay, slowly, and a little doubtfully, "I don't know 's he 'd find the work too hard. Is he strong enough to lift a good-sized rock—one about as big as a man's head?"

"Yes," smiled the Judge, "I guess he can do that!"

"Well, he can qualify then," said Ramsay. "As near as I can find out, the duties of a watchman on the canal consist of his going down there every Saturday night—or, I guess any other night 'd do

—morning, either, for that matter. At any rate, he has to go down to the canal and pick up a good-sized rock, like I told you, and heave it into the canal. If it sinks, everything is all right, and he can go home and feel that the canal is secure for another week. If the rock stays on top of the water, he is expected to run down to Albany and notify the Governor, immediately.”

The Judge tipped his chair back and laughed until he shook. “Jim,” he said, still laughing, “You’re getting to be almost human!”

“Thanks!” said Ramsay, as he rose and reached for his hat, “I’ll have Dudley’s commission-papers sent over in the morning.”

As far as the relations between the Judge and Agatha Loring were concerned, there was very little change apparent. The intense chagrin and humiliation that she felt on account of her snap-judgment in regard to the Judge and John Peabody made her more than ever reticent. That she was heartily ashamed of herself was manifest, and she found it a difficult matter to face the Judge, at all. In fact, she had almost a feeling of resentment toward him for being so utterly different from what she thought he was. It is often very difficult for us to forgive people for what we do to them. In her secret heart, Agatha had always felt that there was “some mistake, somewhere;” and, as she expressed it after-

wards, to Ruth, "The Judge isn't the kind of a man I thought he was, and I didn't think so, any of the time!"

"Meaning," said Ruth, "that you are invariably right, unless you happen to be wrong, mebbe, as Alan Bailey says."

"I notice," said Agatha, with some acidity, "that, of late, you have been quoting this Alan Bailey instead of Dicky Whittlesey, as formerly."

"Oh, yes, indeed!" said Ruth, cheerfully. "Dicky has suffered an almost total eclipse. Besides, I find the legal mind perfectly rich for quoting purposes."

"The *legal* mind?" said Agatha, superciliously; "I was under the impression that Mr. Bailey's mind ran in the direction of flour and potatoes and other groceries."

"No," said Ruth, in a matter-of-fact way, "I wanted him to stick to the grocery business—it is so perfectly highly profiteering, now-a-days; but he cannot be weaned away from the Law. So I suppose I shall have to be content with that."

"*You'll* have to be content with that!" gasped Agatha. "Will you tell me of what earthly interest it can be to *you* what Mr. Bailey's business is?"

"Why, Agatha," said Ruth, in astonishment, "how can you talk so? I'm sure everybody ought to be interested in seeing a worthy and perfectly handsome young man succeed! I am, anyway. I am

surprised that you are not more *pro bono publico*ey!"

"Humph!" snorted Agatha. "I don't consider that Mr. Bailey is the kind of a young man that requires or is entitled to your interest."

Ruth did not reply for a moment, but put on her hat and stopped at the door: "Agatha," she said, with mock severity, "you will please not forget to remember that I am free, white, and almost twenty-one. And you will do well to think over the fact that you have just admitted to me that 'the Judge isn't the kind of a man I thought he was, and I didn't think so, any of the time.' Under all the circumstances, I do not feel that your judgment in regard to men can be called unerring."

Ruth closed the door behind her—not very gently—and Agatha sat with her mouth open, gaping after her daughter. Though Ruth had spoken in a bantering and jocular way, it was plain to Agatha that beneath it there was evidence that Ruth was a very determined person and would probably do about as she pleased. It occurred to Agatha that Ruth was a Rutherford, and the Rutherfords had been known to do impulsive things. For the first time in her life she began to wonder if her judgment, was, after all, really very good. At any rate, she had something to think about, not the least of which was the way that Ruth shut the door.

Another change had taken place in the relations

between the Judge and Alan Bailey. On the day that Alan had been admitted to the bar, the Judge congratulated him. "Do you think of going down to New York and making Elihu Root and John Stanchfield and all those fellows hustle to keep their clients?"

"No," laughed Alan, "I guess Root and the rest of them can sleep nights. I am going to stay here—for a while, at least."

"I'm mighty glad to hear you say that, Son!" said the Judge, with fervent sincerity. "I'd miss you a lot, if you went away. In fact, I don't know just how I'd get along. There's been a sight of work come into the office lately, and I was calculating on turning some of it over to you and pay you what I'd get for it. Or, mebbe," and the Judge looked at Alan quizzically, "mebbe, you're open to a proposition to go into partnership with me?"

Alan started out of his chair: "You don't mean it, Judge, do you?" he said, eagerly. "Why, that is better than anything I could possibly hope for! Am I open to it? Well, I guess I am, if you mean it!"

"Well, then," said the Judge, "we'll call it a bargain. And I'm mighty glad you feel you want to do it! You see, I'm getting a little old, and if you took some of the work off my shoulders, mebbe I'd have more time to go fishin'."

CHAPTER XX

"Is the Judge in?" asked Ruth, as she stepped into the outer office, one hot afternoon late in August. Alan looked up from his book and rose hastily and offered her a chair.

"No," he said, never taking his eyes from the cool vision before him, "the Judge didn't return after he went home to dinner. I don't know where he is, but he may come in any time. Won't you wait?"

"I think I will," answered Ruth, as she seated herself and put her hat and driving gloves on the table. "I'll wait just a few minutes, anyway. Isn't it perfectly bakingly hot? Too hot to wait very long for anybody!"

"You don't look as though you were actually suffering from the heat," said Alan, devouring her with his eyes; "on the contrary, you look deliciously cool."

"Merely surface indications. I feel perfectly volcanic and furnacy within," said Ruth, fanning herself with a lace handkerchief in a languid way. "How long do you suppose that Judge person will keep me waiting?"

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"Really," said Alan, smiling, "I wouldn't even want to hazard a guess. Did you have an appointment with him?"

"Oh, no," said Ruth; "I just wanted him to do something for me—that's all. No appointment."

"Well, possibly, it's something that I can do," suggested Alan, as he closed the book, "if you are in a hurry?"

"I didn't say that I was in a hurry—I intimated that I didn't want to wait," corrected Ruth. "Possibly, as long as the Judge isn't here——" she paused, and looked at Alan appraisingly, but without any great enthusiasm; "although, I—don't know," she went on, doubtfully.

"However poor and inadequate a substitute I may be for so distinguished and capable a person as the Judge," said Alan, with Chesterfieldian bow, "such as I am, and limited as I may be, I hasten to place myself at your dispos——"

"I wouldn't ever have believed you could talk like that! So perfectly Sir Galahady—and everything!" beamed Ruth. "And I think now, that you probably read it somewhere," she added, looking at him sharply. "And while, of course, I'm just perfectly devastated with thankfulness at your offer, I'm not at all sure that you will do." And she sized him up indifferently.

"Without doubt, I shall suffer by comparison with

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the Judge," said Alan, bowing to the floor again, "yet that fact does not deter me from offering my humble services to a lady in distress. If you'll tell me what you've got on your mind, I'll see if I can't help you out."

"In that case, I shall state the facts in the case and you can judge whether you are able to handle the matter as well as the Judge could; and kindly remember that I haven't *said* that you'd do—even if you *think* you would," and Ruth dropped her eyes and took to twisting one of the driving gloves.

"I quite understand," said Alan. "Shoot!"

"Well—you know that I am a very tender-hearted young thing and I just perfectly love to smear kindness and goods deeds all over everybody—I love that word 'smear'—Dicky Whittlesey taught it to me." At the mention of Dicky Whittlesey, Alan shifted in his chair and looked out of the window. Ruth went on, apparently not noticing this change of attitude.

"And then, I have been bored stiff, myself—positively nothing happens that's exciting. I even brought my bull dog down in the car, hoping that Jim would come and take him for a walk past Bradley's—the poor dog hasn't had a nice, comfortable fight since Jim took him out that time—but there seems to be nothing doing, even in that line.

"Well, I got to thinking of the Judge, shut up in

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this hot office with these musty, dusty, smelly old books and papers and things, all day long, and there I had a nice, big, comfortable car, with cushions twelve inches thick—" Ruth paused, and Alan groaned. "And I said to myself, 'Now, I'll just drive down to the Judge's office and will tell him all about the road over to Blue Mountain—how the trees arch over it, and it's cool and breezy, and there's oodles of scenery and rocks and things——'"

"Well, of course," interrupted Alan, sitting up, "if I——"

"And there's the scent of the new-mown hay—I guess it's hay—and the fields of waving grain—at two twenty-six a bushel, or something like that—and the lowing herd of sleek cattle in the meadows—those that haven't gone to Armour as yet—and the plowman homeward plods his weary way on the front seat of his McCormick Automobile Plow, and you hear the tinkling rills, and the song of the jay-bird, and all Nature smiles—just perfectly grins! And then the sable mantle of Night covers all, and the Moon—O, there's the most perfectly gorgeous moon these nights, and——"

"It sounds good to me," said Alan with enthusiasm, "and if——"

"Kindly remember that I am supposed to be talking to the Judge! 'Judge,' I'd say, 'haven't you any poetry in your soul? Why toil in the busy mart

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of trade or fuss around with a dinky old law-suit when the pipes o' Pan are calling from the wooded glade? Can you not hear them?"

"I can hear 'em, all right!" said Alan, "and I——"

"Again, I must remind you that I am talking to the Judge. Where was I—Oh, yes," resumed Ruth, striking an attitude, "hear the pipes o' Pan calling from the wooded glades out on Blue Mountain road? And the hum of the canning-factory and the cheese-foundry and the place where they make condensed milk—all those romantic places are on that road. And I know a place——"

"You need go no further with your alluring description!" said Alan, rising. "I am already convinced that——"

"I'm not through!" said Ruth. "As I was about to say when I was so rudely interrupted, I know a place—it has big, wide verandas and shade trees—where there's the most perfectly large and attractive sign which says, 'Chicken and Waffles Dinner!' Chicken and waffles! Do you get that?"

"Do I get it? I do! Those are my middle names," said Alan. Ruth continued:

"And even from the road, I have detected men in long white aprons carrying trays upon which were tall glasses with something in 'em long and cold and wet, and most suspicious looking! I fear that July

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first means nothing in the young lives of those people!"

Ruth paused and Alan sank back limply in his chair. Ruth looked at him: "Now, what do you suppose the Judge would have said, if I had come in here and talked like that to him?"

Alan looked at her reproachfully. "What would he have said? Huh! He'd have said, 'Three cheers! Let's go!' That's what he would have said, and you know it!"

"Isn't it too bad that he isn't here!" said Ruth, regretfully.

"It is, indeed—for him! He is going to miss something!" said Alan, putting on his hat. "When do we start? That chicken-and-waffles thing dispelled any hesitation I might have felt in the matter!"

"When do *we* start?" repeated Ruth, with astonished eyes. "Why, the very idea! I was just telling you what I intended to say to the Judge—providing he had been here!"

"Oh, were you, indeed!" said Alan, picking up her gloves. "Nevertheless, you have aroused in me an unquenchable desire to get myself all mixed up in the woody-glade-tinkling-rill-cheese-foundry-chicken-and-waffles affair, to say nothing of the moon and those long, cold, wet, suspicious-looking things that the waiters carry around on trays. If

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you won't take me out there, I'll go down to Robinson's livery and hire a horse and go by myself! You have started something!"

"Well, of course," said Ruth, "if you are just perfectly determined to go——"

"I am more than that!" said Alan, with a great show of independence; "you can wait for the Judge, if you want to! I'll see you out there—at the Chicken and Waffles place."

"No, I don't think I'll wait any longer for the Judge," said Ruth, with great apparent regret at his absence, "although I am perfectly sure that you do not care a doggone for the tinkling rill and the wooded glade and the moon—it is the Chicken and Waffles place that has aroused your enthusiasm."

"Well, I must confess that it had its influence," admitted Alan; "but it seems to me that you spoke of it in a way that would lead one to think that *you* did not regard it as altogether negligible. Do you know the road?"

"I suppose I was thoughtless to ever mention chicken and waffles to a man," said Ruth. "However—you are perfectly certain that the entire legal machinery of the great State of New York will not collapse and be put out of commission if you close up the office and call it a day?"

"Perfectly certain!" said Alan. "Have you got enough gas?"

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"And you do not feel that thus early in your career you are neglecting a large number of wealthy clients who may come here and clamor and clamor for you the minute you are gone?"

"I am just perfectly certain *that* will not happen!" laughed Alan. "In fact, I wish they would come and clamor a whole lot! How are the batteries?"

"Well, then, under the circumstances," she said, hesitatingly, "I suppose I shall have to take you—instead of the Judge."

"That's very nice of you!" said Alan, bowing her toward the door. "It wouldn't do to disappoint me now, anyway; you see, I was raised a pet, and I carry on something awful when I'm crossed or disappointed! How are the brakes working?"

"The brakes and the batteries and the gas are doing nicely, thank you," said Ruth, as they took their places in the car, and Ruth threw in the clutch, "and as for knowing the road—that isn't necessary. My nose would lead me straight to that Chicken and Waffles place!"

And whether or not it was Ruth's nose that guided them there, they came, at length, to the delectable place. Past the "oodles of scenery and rocks and things;" past the fields of yellow and expensive grain; past the "sleek cattle" who chewed the cud of placid meditation, all unconscious of Swift and

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Armour and Cudahy and their ilk. Past the tinkling rills and the wooded glades, from which came the mellow music of the pipes o' Pan. Fudge! say you—there are no pipes of Pan! Huh! You do not know! Ordinary, matter-of-fact, prosaic people cannot hear them—but that's no reason for saying that they are not there! Pan is in the glade, sure enough, his funny, hairy, goatlegs cocked up on a stump, playing away for dear life—just exactly as he did some thousands of years ago, in far off, blissful Arcadia! Oh, he's there, all right, but it takes ears that are properly attuned—like Ruth's and Alan's—to hear him.

And then, there was the sunset! Probably, there never *was* such a sunset—except the millions of sunsets that have been viewed by eyes like those of Ruth and Alan. But neither of them had ever seen one like it before—and their word for that! The wonder of it all is, that they ever got to the place of Chicken and Waffles at all! But they did; and here the wonderful things did not abate. Chicken and waffles are not to be despised at any time; but, if you will believe Ruth and Alan, there is no dinner that compares with them at all! Possibly, chicken and waffles wouldn't taste the same to everybody.

It was long after dark when they drove down the mountain—who cares about it's being dark, any-

way! The moon—the great, silver—— Oh, what's the use of trying to talk about the moon! It came out—that's all, and glared grinningly at them; fairly intruded itself on them, and manifested a brazen intention of lighting them all the way home! But there are ways to fool the moon. At a place in the road—the broad, smooth, level ribbon of asphalt that links the mountain to the plain—at a place where the leafy branches of the trees interlocked so that the moon didn't have a chance, Alan turned to the girl beside him and said, "Ruth, I want to ask you a question."

"It is inadvisable to speak to the person at the wheel of a car," said Ruth, throttling the engine down so that it scarcely made a noise at all.

"Yes—I know all about that," said Alan, "but tell me this—did you expect to find the Judge in the office when you came in this afternoon?"

"The Judge?" repeated Ruth, innocently. "Why, the Judge went fishing with the boys this afternoon—I met them as I drove out of our yard."

And now, honest! What would you expect a fellow like Alan Bailey would do—under the circumstances?

CHAPTER XXI

It was nearly eleven o'clock when the brass knocker on the Judge's front door sounded through the house, and he rose from the table in "his room," where he had been absorbed in a mass of papers, and answered the summons. Agatha's chauffeur stood in the doorway:

"If you please, Judge Peabody, Mrs. Loring sent me to ask if you would kindly come over to her house. It is very important. I have the car right here."

"Certainly," answered the Judge. "Just wait until I get my hat;" and, in a moment, he followed the chauffeur out to the car.

There was but a single light in the Loring house, in the drawing-room, when the car drew up to the door, and Agatha admitted the Judge, herself.

"Martin," she said in an agitated tone, after they were seated in the drawing-room and the door carefully closed, "I know that it is simply outrageous for me to bring you here at this hour of the night, but I am so worried I don't know what to do, and you are the only one that I could appeal to. I think Ruth has eloped!"

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“Good Gracious!” said the Judge, greatly startled. “What makes you think that? Who has she eloped with?”

“I feel positive that she has run away with that Alan Bailey!” answered Agatha, all agitation and nervousness. “They were seen driving out of town this afternoon—there was a suit-case in the car—and now just look at the time and she isn’t here yet!”

The Judge was plainly relieved, and he settled back in his chair, from which he had started at Agatha’s announcement of her fears. “Oh, well,” said he, wiping his forehead with his handkerchief, “the time doesn’t mean anything. I can remember—you know how it is with young folks—the time just slips away and they don’t think anything about it. If you haven’t anything more substantial than that to base your prediction on, I’m afraid you’re not a good prophet.”

“Yes, but I *have* something more,” said Agatha; “it was only yesterday that Ruth and I had a talk about that young man, and if I’m any judge of a girl’s actions, she thinks a good deal more of him than she should!”

“‘Should?’” queried the Judge, pursing his lips and lifting his eyebrows. “What’s the matter with Alan Bailey? I take it from your manner that you don’t approve of him?”

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"No, I don't approve of him, by any means!" said Agatha. "I don't know that I can put my finger on anything against him," she added, somewhat hesitatingly, "but he isn't the man I would have picked out for Ruth. I had looked a little higher than a grocery-clerk—a clerk in Bradley's!"

"Well," said the Judge, slowly, "while I wouldn't say that there is anything radically wrong about being a grocery-clerk, yet if that is what you have against him, I can relieve your mind—he isn't a grocery-clerk any longer—he is a lawyer, full-fledged and certified to by The Appellate Division of The Supreme Court of The State of New York. Passed his examinations last week and was admitted to practice. He is conducting quite a few matters for me, right now, and some for himself."

"Oh, yes," admitted Agatha, with little enthusiasm, "I knew that he was studying law in your office, but what earthly chance has he to be anybody—here in this place?" Then, realizing what she had said, she flushed a little, but stuck to her guns and did not qualify her implication.

"It seems to me," said the Judge, after some deliberation, "that he has a mighty good chance. "To begin with, I don't expect that he'll stay here very long, for he's the kind that will attract outside attention—some of our most eminent lawyers began their careers in country towns even smaller

than Spring Valley. I tell you that Alan Bailey is going to make quite a lawyer, before he gets through. He's resourceful, and he's ingenious, and he knows the law. Let me tell you one story about him—it was the first case he ever had and I didn't, for the life of me, see how he was going to win it, and I advised him to tell his client to settle. It seems that one of Sid Pomeroy's game-cocks kept going over into Mike Callahan's garden and scratchin' up the seeds about as fast as Mike could plant 'em. Mike is pretty hot-headed and he thought he'd planted about all the seeds he should on account of that game-cock; and the next time Mike saw him in the garden, he went and got his shot-gun. But the game-cock must have sensed what Mike was doing and he flew back into his own yard before Mike could get out to the garden. But, as I said, Mike is hot-headed, and he went to the fence and took aim and blew the game-cock's head off, right in Pomeroy's own yard, and Sid saw him do it. Well, Sid sued him and put the value of the game-cock at ten dollars. Alan don't like Sid Pomeroy any better 'n I do, and he offered to take the case for Callahan for nothing, just to get a crack at old Sid. Well, at the trial, before old Truesdale, the Justice of the Peace, Alan let the plaintiff put in his case and didn't have any witnesses of his own—admitted the shooting and the

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circumstances, and all that. He did, however, cross-examine Sid.

“‘Did you ever eat a game-cock, Mr. Pomeroy?’ asked Alan.

“‘Eat one!’ sneered Sid. ‘Well, I guess a game-cock like that one would be pretty tough eating! Besides, he was too valuable,’ said Sid, scoring a point for his side.

“‘Valuable in what way?’ asked Alan.

“‘Valuable to fight with,’ answered Sid.

“‘To fight with?’ said Alan. ‘What do you want to fight him for?’

“‘Why, for money, of course,’ said Sid. ‘Didn’t you ever hear of a cock-fight?’ he asks, and everybody laughed.

“‘You mean that you pit him against another rooster in a fight and you bet money on the fight? Is that it?’

“‘I ain’t sayin’ *I* did,’ said Sid, being cagey. ‘I said that was what could be done with him.’

“‘And that was all the gamecock was good for, eh?’ asks Alan.

“‘That’s all,’ says Sid, ‘but he was mighty good for that—he never was licked!’

“‘If the court please,’ says Alan, I move to dismiss this complaint on the ground that the plaintiff has proven no damage. This game-cock was, according to the plaintiff’s own testimony, purely and

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solely an implement of gambling, and an implement of gambling has no value in the eyes of the law, and as such, may be destroyed at any time or place without recovery being made,' and he sat down."

"How did it come out?" asked Agatha, interested in spite of herself.

"Well," continued the Judge, laughing, "Old Truesdale held with Alan and dismissed the suit. I'm not saying it was good law, or whether it would stand up on appeal, but I do say that it showed Alan to be resourceful and ingenious. But anyway all this is beside the question and your doing a lot of unnecessary worrying, anyhow. Ruth and Alan haven't run off—eloped."

"What makes you so positive?" asked Agatha. "Ruth knows better than to stay out till this hour—with a young man, alone! And what about that suit-case in the car? Doesn't that mean anything to you?" And Agatha went nervously to the window and pulled aside the shade and looked out.

The Judge laughed: "I don't know anything about the suit-case," said he, "but I *do* know Alan Bailey—and Ruth, too. I don't say that there isn't a strong attachment between them—for I am sure there is—but as far as running off and getting married's concerned, nothing like that has happened."

"I wish that I could feel the way you do," said Agatha, "but I can't." She looked out of the win-

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dow again, and then returning to her chair, she sat nervously, tapping her foot. "Of course, if it hasn't actually come to that—to an elopement—there is time to stop it."

"Just why do you want to stop it?" asked the Judge, looking at her gravely.

"Because, as I told you, I don't think he's the man for Ruth," said she, a little lamely. "Not the man I'd pick for her, at all!"

The Judge smiled and looked at the ceiling before he spoke: "Can you imagine," he said, slowly, and with evident meaning, "any girl with Rutherford blood in her—your blood—allowing anybody to pick a husband for her?"

Agatha flushed crimson: "Martin," she said, "a girl's mother has her daughter's interests at heart—she has a right to have a hand in the selection of a husband for her!"

"To a certain extent, yes," admitted the Judge; "but I guess you didn't feel exactly that way about it some twenty-odd years ago, did you?" And the Judge smiled faintly.

"No," said Agatha, averting her eyes, and then meeting his squarely, "and look what my head-strong foolishness did for me!"

"I don't think the two cases are exactly parallel," he answered. "I believe there was an element of pique that entered into your affair—impelled you

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to do—what you did. There's nothing of that here," he paused and thought a moment, "unless——"

Agatha looked at him keenly: "Unless what?" she asked.

"Just what kind of a husband do you want Ruth to have?" asked the Judge, ignoring her question. "Rich, handsome, talented, good family, and all that I suppose?" he asked.

"Why, yes," answered Agatha. "Any mother would like to see her daughter marry a man like that."

"And yet," said the Judge, after a long pause, putting his elbows on his knees and clasping his hands in front of him and looking steadily at the floor, "That's exactly the kind of a man you married, isn't it?"

"You know very well, Martin," protested Agatha, "that Jimmy Loring had no character! He had all those other things in abundance, but not a particle of principle!" And she sank back in her chair, her breast heaving.

"I don't recall that you included 'character' or 'principle' in the specifications for a husband that you just gave me a moment ago?" said the Judge. "It looks a little as though you had left out about the most important item in the list of requirements—if you are considering Ruth's happiness."

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Agatha did not reply, but sat twisting a ring on her finger and looking straight ahead.

The Judge waited for a time and went on: "I can't say that Alan Bailey is rich—he isn't, though he will be, some day, unless I'm greatly mistaken. But I guess that in all the other requirements he averages up about as well as the next one. His family's been here for at least two hundred years, and several of them fought and died in the Revolution. He has a fine mind—a very fine mind—and a firm, splendid character—lots of principle and courage. Courage enough, anyway, so that he went to work in Bradley's store so as to *pay* his way rather than to go along on borrowed money—he could have borrowed it from several people." The Judge stopped, and allowed this to sink in. Agatha had dropped her eyes, and was deeply interested in the ring that she twisted.

"By the way," said the Judge, suddenly, sitting back in his chair, "what kind of a man is this Dicky Whittlesey that Ruth talks about so much? She calls him a 'sun-dodger' and a 'bar-fly' and a 'stem-windin' skillimalooch'—whatever that is. But she's always quoting him and seems to miss his society a little."

Agatha sat up sharply: "Dicky Whittlesey is a very wealthy and brilliant scalawag who haunts European capitals and makes pleasure a business.

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Utterly unprincipled and dissipated—more like Jim Loring than any man I ever saw. I brought Ruth back to America very largely to get her away from him. I wouldn't allow her to marry him under any consideration!"

"Like Jimmy Loring, eh?" mused the Judge, with the faintest of smiles.

"Exactly!" said Agatha. "He'll go to any length to gratify his own selfish ends—just exactly like Jim Loring!"

"And, after all," said the Judge, meditatively, "Ruth's a good deal like you—isn't she? High spirited and—impulsive? Apt to take the bit in her teeth?"

"I am beginning to think so," said Agatha, "after the talk I had with her yesterday about Mr. Bailey. She was very obstinate, and showed every inclination to take matters into her own hands, to have her own way."

"Hmmm," mused the Judge, twirling his thumbs. After a moment, he rose and reached for his hat. "I guess I might as well be going, Agatha. "You'll find that Ruth'll come home all right, if she's with Alan Bailey. She isn't going to run away—*not with Alan Bailey, anyhow!*"

Agatha suddenly sat up very straight and gasped. The Judge paused, his hand on the knob of the door. "Mebbe, it's just as well that this Dicky Whittle-

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sey is in Europe. History has been known to repeat itself!"

Agatha opened her mouth as though to reply, but nothing came from it. The obvious parallel struck her with vivid force. Just then, there was a commotion in the hall, and Ruth burst into the room, followed by Alan Bailey.

"Hello, Mother! Why, hello, Judge!" she exclaimed, happily. "Isn't this just perfectly scrumptious to find you two here together! Just like old times! Did you come in a red and green sleigh, Judge?"

"Er—no!" laughed the latter. "Just an ordinary automobile—your mother's. You see, she was worried about your absence—and—er—I just came over to assure her that everything was all right—you see, it was getting late and——"

"I am chargeable with the delay in our return," Mrs. Loring, said Alan, coming forward, "and I regret that you should have been occasioned any worry. Miss Loring was good enough to take pity on my semi-baked condition at the office to-day, and take me for a most delightful drive. I took a suitcase of legal papers and documents which I have been looking over and expected to deliver them to my client on the way back. Unfortunately, we lost the suit-case overboard, and have a spent a considerable time looking for it. I trust that you will

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forgive me—and I promise that it shall not occur again—I shall see that the suit-case is securely fastened, next time!”

It was impossible to have doubted the young man’s smiling frankness, and Agatha murmured a relieved, if perfunctory forgiveness.

“And, Oh, Mother—what do you think?” babbled Ruth, all excitement. “The greatest news! Who do you suppose we met at Blue Mountain Inn, where Alan and I had chicken and waffles? You’d never guess in a thousand years! Dicky Whittlesey! I had quite a chat with him. Same old Dicky! Same old skillimalooch! He’s coming to call to-morrow!”

CHAPTER XXII

AFTER the departure of the Judge and Alan, there had been little talk between mother and daughter. Ruth had said something to the effect that it was "a perfectly nice night," but Agatha was too dazed and preoccupied to respond to common-places. The emphatic protest that she had intended to enter against the existing relations between Alan and Ruth in general, and against the present breach of the proprieties in particular, had been left unspoken. Ruth had kissed her mother with perhaps slightly more than usual warmth, and had run upstairs before Agatha could formulate any definite expression of the many things on her mind.

What the Judge had said seemed to cut the ground from under her feet, and the parallel that he had drawn between her own case and that of her daughter had been, in a way, staggering—the two situations had so many points in common. She was not at all blind to the possibility, now that Dicky Whittlesey was on the ground, that any positive interference or active opposition that she might offer to an alliance between Ruth and the hum-drum Alan, might result to the advantage

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of the impossible Dicky. Only too well she remembered her own experience with Loring—the sundering of all home ties, the packing off to Europe, and her miserable life thereafter. Anything would be better than a similar experience for Ruth! Dicky Whittlesey was not to be thought of for a moment! What the Judge had said about Alan, his prospects and fine character, had had its effect; but it could not refute her vague woman's reason, "He is not the man I would pick out for Ruth."

And so, Agatha passed an almost sleepless night. She tossed on her pillow, vainly trying to pilot the craft of her daughter's Future between the Scylla of Alan Bailey and the Charybdis of Dicky Whittlesey. But, at last, she fell asleep, fully determined upon one thing—it should not be Dicky Whittlesey, under any circumstances.

There could be no question that even Alan Bailey would be the lesser of what she deemed to be two evils. Not that she was satisfied with this alternative, but she reasoned that if Dicky Whittlesey were definitely and finally disposed of and sent about his business, the opportunity might present itself, or even be made, at some future time, to bring about an entire and more satisfactory rearrangement.

The Judge and Alan had declined a lift back to the village in one of the Loring cars, preferring

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the walk under the almost-daylight brightness of the moon. Left to himself, possibly the Judge might have availed himself of the car, but it was Alan's suggestion that they walk, and the Judge readily acquiesced. For some time, the two men walked along in silence, but although the Judge, every now and then, cast a quick glance at Alan's face, there seemed to be little information to be gathered in that way.

"Well, Son," said the Judge, finally, "it's—a nice night!"

"Yes," said Alan, smiling, "it is! I think it's about the nicest night I ever saw!"

"Really?" asked the Judge, with quick comprehension, as he stopped and looked intently into the young man's face.

"Yes," said Alan; "really!"

"By George!" exclaimed the Judge, holding out his hand: "I'm mighty glad! I'm mighty glad!"

"Thank you, Judge," said Alan, grasping the old man's hand. "I knew you would be." And the Judge pumped Alan's hand vigorously.

"By George!" repeated the Judge, after a moment, "I guess I'm gladder 'n that!" And he reached out his hand again. "All right, is it?" he asked, as one who seeks confirmation of good news that is already certain.

"Yes," said Alan, "it's all right."

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"Humph!" chuckled the Judge, looking at the moon, "I don't wonder you wanted to walk back!"

For a time, they walked along, each busy with his own thoughts. At the Judge's gate, the latter said, with just the slightest note of apprehension in his voice, "You saw this Whittlesey person—the 'skillimalooch?' "

"Yes," said Alan, indifferently, "we saw him."

"What about him?" asked the Judge, chuckling.

"The Whittlesey person may go as far as he—can!" laughed Alan, as he started to turn away and bid the Judge good-night. The latter linked his arm into Alan's:

"Wait a minute, Son," he said; "don't go just yet. I am minded that we are overlooking a very ancient and time-honored custom that used to prevail upon such—nice nights as this, though some people, of late, have sought to throw discredit upon it. Come in to my room for just a minute. 'Long about July first, Jim Ramsay brought something in a big black bottle over to me—I haven't opened it yet, and I don't *know* just what it is, but I have my suspicions. I s'pose he figured it might come in handy on a nice night like this, and I don't know but it will. I have my suspicions, also, that it's mebbe a leetle more than the statutory two-seventy-five per cent., but I guess one little hooker won't do us any

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great amount o' harm—seein' it's such a nice night!"

Generally speaking, the enjoyment or satisfaction that one has in the possession of any object is largely due and in proportion to the difficulty experienced in obtaining it. Things that come to us easily are not ordinarily highly prized. And, therefore, there were very few things that Dicky Whittlesey prized very highly or very long. When he wanted anything, about all he had to do was to reach out his hand and take it, whether it was a strawberry in January or an ice-palace in the Sahara. The possession of practically unlimited money by a person whose desires are almost entirely limited to those things which money will buy, had caused him to believe that nothing was invulnerable to the golden arrow. And on those rare occasions, when he ran up against something that resisted such attacks, he was greatly surprised and more or less peeved; and his appetite, jaded by continual satiation, was whetted to the point of insistence. He just *had* to have it! And he would go to any length to get it. And yet, once his desire were accomplished and the thing, whatever it was, became his, he didn't want it at all! This held true whether the aforesaid object was the January strawberry, the tropical ice-palace, or a woman. Dicky did not

believe in chasing a street-car after he had caught it—although to use such a plebeian metaphor as chasing a street-car in connection with Dicky Whitteley is, perhaps, most inappropriate.

The minute that he found that he couldn't have Ruth Loring simply for the asking, he began to think that he wanted her very much indeed, and he set about getting her by hook or crook. He made up his mind that nothing was going to stop him, and a little thing like a trip to America from Paris was the merest of trifles, with such game in sight. He determined that, if necessary, and as far as it would be conducive to his success in his pursuit of the young lady, he would appear to have mended his ways and regulated or abandoned his lax morals and his profligacy. He felt that those things were the basis of Agatha's objection to him as a suitor for Ruth's hand. Very well! He would create the impression that his love for her had made him a much changed and chastened young man; that he had settled down to a serious view of life; and thus he would establish the presumption that he was no longer what Ruth termed "a ring-tailed whooptydoo," and a "stem-winding skillimalooch."

CHAPTER XXIII

IT was with such thoughts in his mind, that, bright and early the next morning, Dicky Whitteley alighted from his run-about at the Loring door and was admitted by a servant. After he had been kept waiting for some considerable time, the maid reappeared and informed Dicky that Miss Ruth would be pleased to receive him in the garden, and thither Dicky followed the servant, regardless of the fact that wet grass and earth do not improve the appearance of white kid shoes.

He found Ruth on her knees, attired in a sun-bonnet and "overally" looking clothes, loosening the earth about the roots of the rose-bushes with a trowel.

"Hello, Dicky!" she said, without looking up. "You are indeed an early bird, and if I happen to dig up a worm, you shall have it."

"Thanks!" said Dicky. "I can stand snails, but I draw the line at worms. Besides, I don't consider that a worm is at all an adequate reward for getting out of bed at this hour and driving all the way out here to see you," he added with the air of an early Christian martyr.

"Dicky!" said Ruth, reprovingly, "I earnestly

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recommend that you search the scriptures and consider the sad fate of Ananias—you did not get out of any bed at this hour! And you ought to know better than to try to put over anything like that on me. You have been up all night! Fie! Oh fie! That you should seek to deceive a poor girl thus!”

“You wrong me! Indeed you do!” protested Dicky; “I can produce a hotel bill to prove it,” he added, putting his hand into his coat pocket.

“Incompetent, irrelevant, and immaterial, and proves nothing, as Alan Bailey, Esquire, Attorney and Counselor at Law, says,” answered Ruth, judicially, “and has no weight whatever as against your previous perfectly well-established reputation.” And Ruth applied herself to the trowel.

“Humph! Give a dog a bad name——” sighed Dicky. “I’ll have you know that long since, I have foresworn and put behind me the Devil and all his works, and no longer do I long for the flesh-pots of Egypt. Seriously, Ruth,” he added, “I am a very changed man from the one you knew in Paris. I have done considerable thinking since you left——”

“Dicky,” said Ruth, sitting back and looking at him and shaking her head in tolerant and smiling incredulity, “Tell it to Sweeney! You know perfectly well that the leopard simply can’t do a thing with his spots.”

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"Well, I'm no leopard," said Dicky, "and besides, I never was acquainted with a leopard who *tried* to change 'em. All the leopards I ever knew appeared to be satisfied to stay spotted. Maybe he could, if he tried!"

"Oh, I suppose there is a remote possibility," laughed Ruth. "You remember the man at the party that they asked if he could play the piano, and he said 'he didn't know—he never tried!'"

"Well," insisted Dicky, "in spite of your illuminating discourse on the subject of leopards and non-piano-playing gentlemen, I assure you that I really turned over a new leaf—cut out all dissipation and foolishness and everything like that. Why, I haven't had a drink since——"

"Let me see that hotel-bill you spoke about a moment ago," said Ruth, putting out her hand. Dicky gave a slight start, but reached into his pocket and pretended to search for it. "I don't believe I have it, after all," he said. "Besides, as your friend, Counsellor Bailey says, that wouldn't prove anything—I might have bought drinks for somebody else."

"You certainly have changed, then," said Ruth maliciously.

"Oh, now, I say!" protested Jimmy, "I guess I always kept up my end when it came to buying

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drinks! But I tell you I'm through with all that sort of thing. I've settled down seriously—I'm going to have a serious purpose in life."

"Commendable, if true," said Ruth, going back to her digging. "But what of it? Why tell me about it?" she added, with most annoying indifference.

"Why—I—er—wanted you to know!" stammered the flabbergasted Dicky, "I wanted you to know that I—— Oh, hang it all! You know, perfectly well, Ruth, why I came over here from Paris—why I have put away all idle and dissolute things and determined to live a different life—a life worthy of you!"

"It seems to me," said Ruth, looking at him with amusement in her face, "that you've done a lot of unnecessary work—like the man who shaved himself just before his head was cut off. To be perfectly frank with you, I don't believe that Dicky Whittlesey, saint, would be half so interesting or entertaining as Dicky Whittlesey, sinner. If you have ceased to be a devil of a fellow, the bloom is off the peach. The viceless Dicky Whittlesey! Ha, ha! Just think of it! Just the same as taking the scent from the rose or the kick out of the high-ball! I wouldn't think you'd be a bit fascinating if you went and denaturalized yourself that way!"

Dicky bit his lip, and then he took out a ciga-

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rette-case and selected one and tapped it on the box assiduously. He was at a loss as to how to proceed. He felt that he was making little headway on his present tack, and it was clear, too, that Ruth did not believe him. It might be better to hedge a little—to clip a little off the wings he had grown between his shoulder blades and reduce the size and brilliance of the halo that he placed about his head.

“When I said that I had put away folly and had a serious purpose in life, I didn’t mean that I’ve concluded to be a sap,” he said, as he lit the cigarette and took a deep inhalation. “I have no idea of rigging myself up in tortoise-shell spectacles and a Prince Albo coat and dishing a poor, deserving professional reformer out of his job and leading in prayer and being anti-everything. Far be it from such! I’m going to be moderate and reasonable—temperate, that’s the word! Probably, the sight of a cock-tail would not drive me into spasms, right now. But I’m going to be moderate and temperate—that’s my speed from now on—and a serious purpose in life.”

“Well, I don’t know as I can be expected to get up any very great enthusiasm over what you say,” said Ruth indifferently. “Isn’t it astonishing what a lot of attention rose-bushes require?” she added,

pausing in her efforts with the trowel and sitting back to survey her work.

"I had certainly hoped that such a resolve on my part would meet with a little approbation from you—and possibly some encouragement," said Dicky, in a disappointed way. "I thought it might mean something to—us both."

"Oh," said Ruth, hastily, "I am perfectly full of unconfined joy when any one *does* a thing like that! You will remember that I remarked that I could not be expected to get up enthusiasm over what you *said*. I am from Missouri, as Alan Bailey says."

"Alan Bailey, eh?" said Dicky, looking at her through narrowed eyelids. "I presume Alan Bailey is the hick that was with you last night at The Blue Mountain Inn? What ice does he cut?" he asked, a trifle contemptuously. "I notice that you didn't introduce him," he sneered, in a way that indicated that Ruth might be ashamed of her escort.

"No," said Ruth, demurely, as she resumed her digging; "Alan is particular about meeting people—and people that I meet. If you hadn't come out to the car as we were leaving, he wouldn't have even suspected that I knew you. But, of course, after that, I *had* to tell him."

"Well, I'm damned!" said Dicky, aghast.

"Evidently your scheme of renovating yourself

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does not include the abandonment of profanity," said Ruth.

"So he's particular about who you meet, is he?" gasped Dicky.

"'Whom', Dicky, not 'who'!" corrected Ruth, calmly. "I hope you're not thinking of giving up the English language along with all those other things."

"Do you mean to tell me that you have committed yourself to his care—his direction?" asked Dicky, hotly. "In other words, that you are engaged to him? Is it possible that you can mean any such thing as that?"

"Sssh! Not so loud! It's a secret!" cautioned Ruth, in a stage whisper. "You're the first person that I've told!"

"Well, I should think you'd want it to be a secret!" declared Dicky, wiping the perspiration from his flushed, angry face. "For Heaven's sake, Ruth," he went on, changing his tone to one of solicitous regret, "consider what you're doing! Don't throw yourself away upon this yokel—this backwoods pettifogging lawyer—a man in no way your social or intellectual equal—your equal in no way—who can give you nothing—nothing of the things that make life worth while! A plodding nobody, who——"

"Move a little over that way," said Ruth, in a

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matter-of-fact tone, "I want to get at that bush and you are in the way. You were saying——?"

"You know very well what I was saying!" said Dicky, impatiently. "Why won't you be serious for a minute? It is not a matter——"

"Don't you realize, Dicky, that it is a good thing for you that I am not serious—that I don't take you seriously?" asked Ruth, looking up at him steadily, with a contemptuous smile on her face. "You know," she went on, with an ominous calmness in her manner, "if I took you seriously, I might be tempted to say some very unpleasant things. But the only way to take you is as a joke! You really are a joke, and a very funny one, at that! You have no idea how funny you are! It is a scream to have you stand here and call Alan Bailey a yokel and a back-woods, pettyfogging lawyer and a hick, and a man who is not my social or intellectual equal! It makes me laugh! Of course, you wouldn't take the chance of saying such things to him, even over the long-distance telephone! And the next funniest thing to that is this beautiful tale of reformation that you have been handing out to me. If I took you seriously, I would be tempted to ask you—is it possible that you are stupid enough to imagine that I believe one word of it? I really gave you credit for more sense than that! And what, will you kindly tell me, made you think that

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I'd care a straw whether it were true or not? Where on earth did you get the idea that it made any difference to me whether you continued to be the depraved little blackguard that you always were, or whether you succeeded in lifting yourself high enough so that, by the use of a step-ladder, you could tie the shoes of decent people?"

Dicky swallowed hard, and strove to speak, but the smiling Ruth went on before he could get started.

"But, of course, as I'm not taking you seriously, I shan't have to ask you such questions. But there is one thing that I'd like to know—is it possible that you thought, for one minute, that I would seriously consider a proposal of marriage from you? That because I, a kid in Paris, used to be tickled at seeing you cut up monkey-shines in that more or less free and easy society, and watched you flaunt your money about, and always was an appreciative audience for your patter and small-talk, did you think on account of that, Dicky, that I didn't have you gaited and sized and labelled and numbered? Twenty-three was the number, Dicky! And to think that you came all the way over from Paris to tell me that fairy story! And the really funny part of it is, what difference would it have made if I did believe it? Don't you see what a scream the whole thing is?" And Ruth laughed a clear, ringing, hearty laugh that made Dicky Whittlesey

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feel like committing murder. She stopped for a moment to get her breath, but looking at Dicky, whose face was purple, she burst out again. "Now run away and sell your papers!" said Ruth as well as she could between fits of laughter. "Maybe you can catch the next steamer, if you hurry!"

And Dicky Whittlesey went away from there talking to himself.

His car had scarcely left the Loring place, when Agatha came hurrying out into the garden, and her manner indicated considerable perturbation. She had resolved that she would be present at any interview between Dicky and Ruth and nip anything like a proposal in the bud. But because of the restless night, she had slept long after the time she had set for rising, and her manner showed that she feared the worst.

"The maid tells me that Dicky Whittlesey has been here—has he gone?" she asked, anxiously.

Ruth smiled: "Yes, he's gone—did you think I might have him concealed somewhere about me?"

"Well, what did he say?" asked Agatha, breathlessly.

"My dear mother! He said a great deal!" And the minx dropped her eyes in a pensive maidenly way—"a very great deal. He told me all about his reformation—how good he intends to be—for my sake!" This last almost in a whisper, accom-

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panied by a suffusing blush. "It make me feel—I can't tell you how happy it makes me feel, Mother!" And Ruth simpered and blushed and clasped her hands in front of her in a most languishly mushy way.

"Fiddlesticks!" snapped Agatha, in despair. "The idea of his reforming! Do you mean to tell me that you believe any such stuff and nonsense as that?"

"Oh, Mother!" said Ruth, reproachfully; "I wish you could have heard him—he talked so beautifully about it! And to think—he did it all for me!" And the artful hussy cooed like a turtle-dove.

"Well, you are a bigger fool than I thought you were!" wailed Agatha. "Don't you know that there isn't a particle of sincerity in the man? That he hasn't the slightest idea of changing his ways one iota except to pull the wool over your eyes and mine and—I suppose, from what you say and the way you act, that he asked you to marry him?" asked Agatha, disgustedly.

"Oh, Mother!" said Ruth, brokenly, "How can you talk so about him, after he——" and the young lady gave a fine imitation of a loving and trusting girl whose soul is being crushed.

"How can I talk so about him? Because I know him, that's why!" said Agatha, with fine scorn.

"Well, go on! Tell me the worst! Can it be that you were silly enough to accept him?"

"Oh, Mother!" blushed Ruth, turning away and picking a rose to pieces just exactly the way that Bernhardt would have done it, "I—I——" and she paused in maidenly confusion, and looked down.

"Goodness gracious!" gasped Agatha, in helpless despair. "Well, I'll tell you right now that you shall never marry him! To think that you should be silly enough and goose enough to think of marrying Dicky Whittlesey when there are such men as (it hurt her to say it, but it was the only remedy) Alan Bailey around. Why, the Judge says he's a splendid young man and is going to make his mark—and everything!"

"But you said that he was a grocery-clerk and you ran him down fearfully only the other day!" said Ruth, with a surprised look.

"I didn't know about him then," said Agatha, the light of hope dawning in her breast as she thought she detected a slight wavering in Ruth's attitude.

"Isn't it a little late to tell me that?" asked Ruth, reproachfully; "to change about so completely, after Dicky has been here and——"

"It isn't too late for you to back out of something that would ruin your whole life!" said Agatha. "Just because you've been silly enough and foolishly sentimental enough to promise Dicky

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Whittlesey to marry him, isn't any reason that **you** should suffer all your life, now that you have come to your senses!"

"And you really mean it when you say—that you'd be willing to have me marry Alan Bailey—if he asked me?" said Ruth, shyly.

"Why, of course I do!" said Agatha, making a strong mental reservation however.

"Then, Mother," said Ruth, demurely, "it shall be as you wish. I think I rather prefer Alan, myself!"

Agatha started at the suddenness of Ruth's conversion. She had a vague feeling that there was something wrong, somewhere. "Of course," she said, by way of hedging slightly, "we may be a little premature. Mr. Bailey may not ask you; you have known each other but a comparatively short time, and he may not be thinking of such a thing."

"Oh, yes he is," said Ruth, with an air of confidence.

"How do you know?" asked her mother, more than ever puzzled.

"He asked me last night," said Ruth, blandly.

"And what——" gasped Agatha, looking apprehensively in her daughter's face.

"Why, I accepted him, of course!" said Ruth. "I was sure you'd change your mind about him—just as you say you have. I told Dicky about it

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—after he had spun that perfectly beautiful but sadly transparent reformation stuff, and I guess he didn't like it. He went off mad!"

Agatha sat down hard on a nearby bench, and snapped her jaws together.

"I was sure," said Ruth, soothingly, as she came to her mother and put her arm about her, "that you'd like Alan—when you came to know him!"

CHAPTER XXIV

EVERY year, as summer waned, it became necessary for Jim Ramsay as political boss, to tell the voters what men they wanted to administer the affairs of the county for the year or two that followed. Of course, there were primaries and all that, but what of it? The slate was made up, just the same, in Jim Ramsay's office in the Ramsay Building, in Millville; and the free and enlightened electorate marched right up to the polls in November and exercised their glorious right of franchise according to schedule. Ramsay was the engineer of a well-oiled machine, and he had just about the same control over it that an engineer on The New York Central has over his locomotive. If the machine got out of order and he couldn't keep it running, it was up to Ramsay—or the engineer of the locomotive—to fix it. If he couldn't fix it, he could look for another job. So could the engineer.

And to Ramsay's office, in the Ramsay Building, came, at one time or another, all those who were the crew of the machine, and those who desired to ride upon it into public office. The whole affair was conducted on a business basis—the basis of *quid*

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pro quo. If you have done so much for the party the party will do so much for you. The question of the fitness of a candidate for office rarely entered into party calculations; "regularity" was what counted in the selection of candidates. If the party put a man into public office, it put him there, not to conduct the affairs of that office to the best of his ability and in accordance with what was right. Not at all! It put him there to conduct affairs in a way that would be to the best interest of the party. "What's the constitution among friends?" On any question wherein the party's interest was concerned, the office-holder must come to the Boss and get his orders and act accordingly. That was what constituted being "regular." If, as occasionally happened, a man kicked over the traces and refused to follow party dictates, he was dropped by the party, *unless* he had acquired power enough to be elected in defiance of the party. In that case, the party adopted him again, with loud acclaim, *as a boss*, and *they had to come to him* for orders. After all, it didn't make much difference—it was merely a question of being bossed by Tweedledum or Tweedledee. The Public "got off" at the same place, anyway.

In the entire state, there was, perhaps, no county so thoroughly under one-man control as the county where Jim Ramsay held the reins. His domination

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was complete and undisputed—"What Ramsay says goes!" He had attained this position largely because of the fact that he played the game square, as far as those who were with him were concerned. He never broke a promise and he knew how to reward faithful service. He knew that the machine wouldn't and couldn't run without those things—just as an engine won't run without oil and gas. And he was shrewd enough to see that a departure from these principles weakened the machine just that much. However, all big men—and Ramsay was a big man, despite his faults—have weaknesses and whims. Jim Ramsay was no exception. One of his weaknesses was gratitude—and gratitude *is* a weakness in a politician. He must *say* how grateful he is, but it is seldom advisable to actually *show* any gratitude unless there is "something in it." "Gratitude," sneered a hardened, old political leader, "is a lively sense of favors *yet to come!*" That is certainly true as far as politics is concerned. Whether it applies to mankind generally is, perhaps, debatable. It didn't apply to Jim Ramsay, however.

As he came down the steps of Joe Belcher's bank one afternoon, with Sandy tagging at his heels—since John's death, Ramsay and Sandy were inseparable—he met the boys. Fatty, Snootey, Jim, and Lefty McCarthy all wore long faces and were sore troubled. Sandy frisked about his old friends rap-

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turously and the boys were just as glad to see Sandy as Sandy was to see the boys. Since John's death, too, a more or less intimate association had sprung up between Ramsay and John's pals, and it seemed as though the man sought to extend to them some of the love and solicitude that he felt should have been the portion of his own son.

"Hello, Mr. Ramsay!" said Fatty, as he picked up Sandy and petted him, "Why don't y' git a nice collar fer Sandy with yer name on it?"

"Well," said Ramsay, "collars aren't comfortable for a dog, especially in summer. Haven't you noticed how they always try to scratch 'em off?"

"That's what John used to say," said Snootey, "but I didn't know you knew 'bout it."

"Yes, I knew about it," said Ramsay, a little sadly. "But here—I came near forgetting. Take this dollar and split it up. I'll bet you haven't had any ice-cream in a week, have you?"

"Sure, we did!" said Snootey, in spite of the violent and brazenly manifest efforts of Jim and Lefty to stop him; "we had so much, it's runnin' right out of our ears now. Th' Judge an' Miss Ruth blows us off to it ever' time they see us. Mebbe, though," he continued, in response to energetic digs in the ribs from Jim and Lefty, "we could use th' dollar."

"Go to it!" laughed Ramsay. "But, say—what's

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the matter? You boys don't look over-happy. Has somebody been putting the bee on you?"

"You said it!" remarked Lefty McCarthy, disgustedly. "We bin stung good an' plenty! We was gonna ask you mebbe you could fix it? We got pinched!"

"Got pinched?" said Ramsay. "What for?"

"Fer nuthin'," declared Fatty. "'cause we went in swimmin' 'thout no bathin'-suits on! Miss Shumway had us pinched! I'd like to know what good a bathin'-suit does?"

"Yessir!" put in Snootey, excitedly. "Peel Brackett snuk up an' grabbed us an' took us up t' ol' Truesdale's offuss—he's bin 'pointed Justice o' th' Peace, er sumpin', an' Miss Shumway made a c'mplaint."

"Miss Shumway am due t' git a rock th'o' her winda dis night!" solemnly announced the belligerent Jim, as he fondled a stone nearly as large as his head, which he had already collected for his avowed purpose.

"Well, where were you swimming?" asked Ramsay.

"Way down below th' cannin'-fact'ry," said Fatty. "'T ain't near any place, an' the' can't nobody see you an' th' water's deep an' we got a spring-board!"

"That seems to be an out-of-the-way place," said

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Ramsay. "It must be half a mile from town. How did Miss Shumway know you went in swimming there?"

"She follied us!" said Lefty.

"How do you mean—she followed you?" asked Ramsay, laughing. "'T isn't near the road is it—nobody can see you from the road?"

"Naw," said Lefty. "Y' can't see nuthin' from d' road! She was comin' 'long d' road an' she seen us turn off'n d' road an' go down t'ro' d' woods t' d' river, an' she follied us!"

Jim lifted up the rock and kissed it fondly. "Oh, Boy!" he said, as his imagination pictured its flight through Miss Shumway's window.

Ramsay laughed long and loud. "Well, what did the judge say to you? Did he send you all to jail?"

"Nossir!" said Fatty. "The Judge cum an' spoke fer us! He tol' ol' Truesdale th' whole thing was ridic'lus. He giv' Miss Shumway a tur'ble layin'-out. Y' oughta heard 'im! She beat it!"

"Well, when I said 'the judge' I meant the Justice of the Peace," said Ramsay. "What did he say—what did he do to you?"

"Ol' Truesdale ain't no Judge!" said Fatty indignantly. "The Judge—Mr. Peabody—he's the Judge, ain't he? Ol' Truesdale's nuthin' but Jus-

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tice o' th' Peace. He said we mustn't go in swimmin' in th' river a tall!"

"Whaddy' know 'bout dat?" said the disgusted Lefty.

"Truesdale forbid you to go swimming at all, eh?" asked Ramsay.

"Can't swim a lick—no place!" assured Fatty, ruefully.

"Yes, an' y' c'n go bet if 't was the Judge we wouldn' 'a' got no raw deal like that!" said Snootey. "The' wouldn' *nobuddy* git a raw deal! Say, Mr. Ramsay, what's the Judge judge of, anyway? Ever'-body calls him 'Judge,' but he don't do no judgin', 's far 's I c'n see. Where does ol' Truesdale come in t' do any judgin' when th' Judge is 'round?"

"You said it!" quoth Lefty. "Th' Judge 'd 'a' throwed Miss Shumway out 'n d' winda!"

"Yaas, an' Ah's gwine th'ow yo' *in* de winda!" said Jim, talking to the rock. "Yo' shore has a duty to puffo'm! Good ol' rock!"

Jim Ramsay, the Boss of the county, stood strangely silent, and he was manifestly thinking about something. The boys waited for the gems of thought that seemed about to fall from his lips. They felt that here was where their wrongs would be righted. But The Hon. Jim Ramsay only rolled his cigar around in his mouth, took a firm hold upon it with his teeth, and looked up at the sky.

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"Hmmm!" he said, "I'll have to think it over," and he walked away abstractedly, and took the next train for Millville.

"Well whaddy' know 'bout dat?" asked Lefty, when his astonishment had subsided sufficiently for him to speak.

"Look to me lik' dat man done los' intrus'," said Jim, as he watched Ramsay out of sight. Then he fondled the rock: "Hyar sumpin' ain't gwine lose intrus'," he said, significantly.

"Well, all I ask," said Fatty, displaying extraordinary caution, for him "is that y' don't heave 'er thro' Miss Shumway's winda till I git home! It'll be blamed on me 'f I can't prove right where I was, an' I got 'nuff t' stan' for, right now!"

This was reluctantly agreed to by Jim, and they all started off to get the dollar changed. Even the blissful state of having a whole quarter in his pocket does not prevent time from hanging heavy on the hands of a boy who is positively forbidden to do something—especially a country boy who is told that he *can't* go swimming.

"Well, what'll we do now?" asked Snootey, his voice filled with ennui.

For a long time, nobody had anything to suggest.

"Let's go swimmin'!" said Fatty.

CHAPTER XXV

WITH Alan Bailey as the accepted suitor for Ruth's hand, Agatha's attitude toward him underwent a great change. She had, at first, rather helplessly resigned herself to the inevitable, feeling that it was worse than useless to offer any further opposition to the match. Then, the more she saw of him, now that he had become a daily visitor at the house, her baseless prejudice began to melt away, and in a very short time, she came to the conclusion that Ruth had made a wise choice. The fact that she was beginning to doubt her own judgment may have contributed to this change of attitude. As she reviewed her life, she was compelled to admit to herself that she had made one mistake after another when she had been guided by her own impulses. She had done little, for some years but jump at conclusions, at least, as far as the Judge was concerned, and she had been wrong every time. She had, as a matter of fact, begun to think that maybe it would be better to accept advice on some matters, rather than to attempt to run things herself; and it was with a chastened and more or less open mind

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that she now made her analysis of her daughter's future husband.

And as the days went by, and close association with the young man brought to her notice the splendid qualities in him, she actually came to lean upon him and trust him in a way that had seemed impossible a few weeks before. If in the beginning, she had had any idea that Alan's eyes were on the Loring money, that idea was soon dissipated.

One evening, on the piazza, when plans for the future were under discussion, Agatha, said, a little jealously, "I suppose, when you two are married, I shall have to get out of here—or will you let me live with you?"

"My dear Mrs. Loring," said Alan, "you cannot doubt that you will be more than welcome to live with us! We sincerely hope you will. But you cannot possibly imagine that I would come here to live after Ruth and I are married?"

"Why, why not?" asked Agatha. "I didn't expect that you would go wandering off some place by yourselves! This house is surely big enough for us all!"

"Indeed it is!" said Alan. "Much too big, in fact. I cannot hope for an income large enough to maintain such a place as this for some years, I fear."

"Well, Ruth has a quite considerable income and so have I," began Agatha "and I should think——"

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Alan didn't let her get any further: "I had hoped, Mrs. Loring," said he, with a quiet smile that neither you nor Ruth would make any such suggestion to me, but I am sorry to say, both of you have. And while I appreciate the sincere and generous motives that prompt you to make the suggestion, I could, under no circumstances, allow myself to accept it. 'Peter, Peter, pumpkin-eater' was not even distantly related to me and—we're going to have a house of our own, aren't we, Ruth?"

"Now, Agatha!" exclaimed Ruth, putting her hand over Alan's mouth. "The perfectly big goose has gone and told it! Do you remember the suitcase we lost that night? Well, Alan got a perfect gob of money out of it—the law-suit, I mean, and we bought a lot the other day, the dearest place, right near the Judge's, and there are big trees and a small mortgage on it, and we're going to build a perfectly dear little house! Alan's got the plans down at the office. And it was to be a surprise! And we can enlarge the house if we—we can enlarge the house."

That settled any further "Peter, Peter, pumpkin-eater" business.

Usually, now, the Judge dropped in for a moment evenings, and Agatha began to look for his coming. She had never forgiven herself for her suspicion of him, and perhaps, for shame on account of this, she

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had been a trifle aloof. The old days—the days of their youth—were seldom referred to, and if they were, the reference was to such things as would not readily bring to mind their former romance. And there they were, drifting, never getting any nearer; each heart yearning for the other, and yet an intangible “something” holding them apart.

One evening, early in September, the Judge did not come; and Agatha, plainly distraite, went up to bed early. There was a chill in the air, and Alan and Ruth went into the library where there was a cheerful fire burning in the grate. As they sat before the fire, Alan happened to glance in the direction of one window that opened into the garden, and there, with his face almost pressed against the pane, he saw a man’s face. As Alan looked, the face was instantly withdrawn. Alan did not start or give any evidence that anything unusual had happened, but rose leisurely. “I think I will run over to the Judge’s for a moment before he gets to bed. I want to see him about a matter.”

“Yes,” said Ruth, quietly, “I saw the man at the window, too. I will go with you.”

“You will do nothing of the kind,” said Alan, firmly. “You stay right here and I’ll investigate.”

Ruth, however, would not be denied going out onto the piazza, and Alan made his way into the garden. He returned in a moment, holding a man

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by the collar. The man made no attempt at resistance; in fact, he seemed perfectly willing to come. In the light from the hall, his appearance did not give the impression that he was a marauder or a person with sinister motives but, rather, a man whose status was that of a comfortably well-off tradesman. He had been recently shaven, his clothes were of good material and well-made, and his haberdashery evinced some taste. He appeared to be about forty-five years old, and was of rather slender build.

"Will you kindly give an account of yourself," asked Alan, releasing his hold upon the man's collar when he had looked him over in the light, "and explain why you come into peoples' gardens and look into windows at night?"

"I will—very gladly," said the man. "I am looking for a lady who was once Agatha Rutherford, but I am informed that her name is Mrs. Loring now. I was directed here. If she is here I would like to see her. She can, perhaps, relieve your minds as to any question about myself."

"She is my mother," said Ruth, "but she has retired. Would your business wait until morning?"

"It is somewhat urgent that I see her tonight," said the man; "I have come a long distance and I feel confident that she will justify my insistence."

"Who directed you here?" asked Alan.

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"A colored woman—a very large colored woman at Mr. Martin Peabody's house," the man answered, frankly. "When I arrived in town, I went directly to Mr. Peabody's home—I used to know him, years ago—but he was not at home, and the woman directed me here."

The appearance of Agatha on the scene put a stop to any further questioning. "What is it?" she said. "Someone to see me?"

"Yes," said Alan; "so he says."

Agatha looked at the man, who did not speak at once, but stood with a faint smile on his face, and as though he were waiting to be recognized.

"If you will tell me," she began, stepping nearer to the man. She stopped suddenly and looked at him closely. "Billy!" she shrieked. "It's Billy! My own brother Billy! Come back to me from the dead! O, Billy, Billy!" And she fell sobbing upon his breast.

Billy soothed her and kissed her affectionately; then he glanced at Alan, who nodded sympathetically, and opened the library door. Thither went brother and sister, into the fire-lit room, their arms about each other, and Alan closed the door softly behind them.

Ruth and Alan made their way back to the piazza.

"You have now beheld a perfectly good family skeleton!" said Ruth. "But it had long since ceased

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to rattle very loud in its closet. But now, it seems to refuse to stay in its closet—and I am perfectly glad, for mother's sake! Possibly, now that you have heard it rattle a little, you want to know about it? May be you wont want to marry we when you hear all about it," she went on, looking at him quizzically.

Alan smiled: "A whole graveyard full of skeletons couldn't stop me!" said Alan, smiling. "You may tell me—if you want to."

"Well," began Ruth, "once upon a time, ages and ages ago, when Mother was a girl, Uncle Billy—he looks to me more like 'Uncle William' than Uncle Billy—Uncle Billy was a black sheep, and he hadn't any wool, or didn't gather any moss, or something. And he used to go out nights and take on a load of ales, wines, liquors, and cigars, and get perfectly spifficated and then start in to 'clean up.' And I guess he wasn't a very good cleaner, because, one night, he stabbed a man. Real good cleaners don't have to use a knife or a gun, do they?" "Well," said Alan, smiling, "it depends a little upon the sort of cleaning you want to do, I guess."

"Anyway," continued Ruth, "Uncle Billy stabbed the man, and everybody thought he was going to die, and Uncle Billy's friends got him out of town as fast as they could; and nobody has ever seen or heard of Uncle Billy from that time to this." Ruth paused, and then continued in a softened tone: "He

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was Mother's only brother, and they were very fond of each other. Mother never quite got over it, and she has mourned him as dead. It was the same night that Mother ran away and married Father. It was a great night for the Rutherford family!"

Ruth sighed and sat with drooped eyes for a moment; then she continued a little dully: "The man lingered between life and death for weeks, but he finally got well; so, you see, we haven't a real genuine, blown-in-the-bottle murderer in the family, after all! Only a kind of an aspirant—willing, but amateurish. We can boast only a dilettante assassin, and he doesn't look to me as though he had got real professional yet!"

Ruth rattled on with nervous rapidity—almost hysterically—and Alan laughed when she had finished; but when he looked at her, he saw that her eyes were filled with tears. He drew her to him, and she sobbed outright and clung to him.

"Why, Ruth!" he soothed; "What a little goose you are! What on earth are you crying about? One can't help such things happening in any family. Besides, it was so long ago that everybody has either forgotten it or is dead, by this time."

"You better—not let—Mother hear you—say—that!" said Ruth, half smiling through her tears. "Besides," she went on, drying her eyes, "maybe I

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was crying because our murderer wasn't a good one!"

Far into the night, almost until the dawn, after the cheer and the crackle had gone out of the fire on the hearth, and the flames had turned to embers, and the embers had died to ashes, Agatha and Brother Billy sat and talked and talked. A lot of things can happen in twenty-odd years of separation between brother and sister that need discussion. Frequently, their hands sought each other in affectionate pressure; and once, Agatha started violently, aghast at something Billy told her. She leaned forward and questioned him earnestly.

"Yes," said Billy, nodding his head, "that's just how it happened. It was early in the evening when I stabbed the man, and Martin Peabody was just going along the road in a buggy. He was going to take you to a party, he said. But when I told him what had happened, he made me get into the buggy and he drove me 'round to his house and hid me there while he got some girl's clothes to disguise me. He didn't dare to go to our house to get some of yours, for he thought it might be watched. Then, when it got very late, he drove me out of town by the Vernon road. We passed you and Jim Loring, but I guess you didn't see us."

Agatha sank back in her chair and covered her face with her hands. Back through the mists of the

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years came the remembrance of that night when she had seen Martin Peabody on the road "with another girl," and to spite him, she had listened to Jimmy Loring's proposal!

"Didn't I!" she gasped. "O, God! If I only hadn't!"

CHAPTER XXVI

THE Judge had finished his breakfast to Easter's entire satisfaction, and after being provided with a clean handkerchief, was being brushed off in the hall, when Jim came tearing in from the back way.

"Please, Jaidge, Sah," he began, breathlessly, "Mistis Lorin' 's shover done got de cyar out front an' says will yo' kin'ly drap in fo' a minnit 'fore yo' goes t' d' offuss?"

Easter gave the Judge an extra brush or two and retied his necktie, and he went off wondering.

Agatha met him on the piazza and motioned him to a chair, after they had exchanged greetings. She sat for a time, looking off into space and tapping her foot, and the Judge regarded her with some apprehension. He had learned that when a woman taps her foot, there is something coming.

He was the first to break the silence. "Ahem!" he began, pulling down the corners of his mouth, as though to repress a smile, "It's a nice day!"

Agatha looked at him witheringly: "I don't think that I shall ever see a nice day again!" she said, and her manner indicated that she blamed him for that deplorable outlook.

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"Good Gracious!" said the Judge. "Is it as bad as that? What's the matter—spilled something on a new dress, or has Dicky Whittlesey come back, or what?"

"No!" snapped Agatha; "It isn't any of those things and nothing like them!" And she glared at him again. "Martin," she went on, in a low tone, "I think you're more kinds of a fool than anybody alive—except possibly myself!"

"Well," said the Judge, "you're not really giving me any information. I've known that for years—though I don't make any exceptions. I claim to be in a class by myself!"

"I wouldn't wonder if you are!" said Agatha. "I declare, I don't know what to call you!"

"Well," smiled the Judge, "I've been called a good many things in my time—possibly I might make a suggestion?"

"Useless! Perfectly useless!" said Agatha. "No words ever uttered would half express what I want to say to you! But before I do really begin to tell you what I think about you, I want you to meet somebody," and she went to the door and called, and Billy came out onto the piazza and walked over to the Judge. The latter rose and took Billy's outstretched hand and peered into his face. Then he shook Billy's hand.

"Why didn't you write me, Billy?" he asked.

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"Why did you let all these years go by without telling Agatha that you were still in the land of the living? I guess she's grieved over your absence more than you had a right to let her."

"I was afraid to, at first, Martin. I didn't know but the man was dead—didn't know until last night—and I thought maybe they might trace me in some way, if I wrote to anybody. And I buried myself in China and Russia and other ends of the world; and as the years went by, I suppose I began to feel that it didn't make any difference, anyhow. I didn't figure that I was any very great loss or very much for anybody to mourn over."

Agatha put her hand on Billy's shoulder lovingly, as Billy went on.

"Agatha says that you never told her how you helped me to get out of town that night—why didn't you, Martin? It would have been all right and saved—well—a lot of trouble."

The Judge mopped his forehead with his handkerchief and said, slowly, almost apologetically, "Well, in addition to the fact that I gave you my word I wouldn't tell, I didn't really get much of a chance for about twenty years, and then, I couldn't see that it would do any great amount of good. You know, as Agatha says, explanations aren't often very satisfactory."

Agatha winced a little, then sank into a chair, her

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hands clasped in her lap, and there was a rather awkward pause. The Judge finally broke it: "You have done well, Billy—been prosperous?"

"Fairly so, Martin, fairly so. And now that this Sword of Damocles is removed, I feel like a new man. But I think that I shall go back to the far East. I have been there so long that I can almost feel my eyes beginning to slant. Do you think there is any danger of my being molested if my presence here were generally known? Am I free to go about without concealing my identity?"

"I don't see how there can be the slightest danger. I believe you were indicted, and if you wish, I'll go before the court and try to have the indictment dismissed; but that would only be stirring things up and might start a lot of publicity. It's better to let sleeping dogs lie. I doubt if the District Attorney is going to dig that indictment out of a musty pigeon-hole and try it. He'd have hard work getting any witnesses at this late day, and I guess he's got plenty to do without going that far back into the past. It's just possible that Jim Ramsay can fix it without any noise—Jim's been known to fix things—sometimes."

Agatha glanced quickly at the Judge and then dropped her eyes, and her face colored as she thought.

The Judge rose. "Well," he began, "I'm glad

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to see you back, Billy, and I hope—Good Gracious!” he exclaimed, “Look who’s here!” And with a great flourish Ruth swung up the drive in her car and came to a stop at the piazza with a jerk. In the seat beside her was no less a person than Ramsay, himself, with his hat jammed down over his ears, a cigar in his teeth, and Sandy in his arms. Clinging to the roadster like flies were Fatty, Snootey, Jim, and Lefty McCarthy. From the running-board on the other side of the car, the tall figure of Alan Bailey unkinked itself, and he stretched the stiffness from his limbs.

“Well,” said the Judge, with a smile, “I guess we’re all here! Didn’t over-look anybody, did you, Ruth? I think you better look out, young lady—seven people in a two-seated car is going some? My Stars! First thing you know the Society for The Prevention of Cruelty to Automobiles will get after you! I don’t know as I ever heard of that society, but I guess there must be one—there’s a society for the prevention of about everything else!”

“I just *had* to bring ’em!” beamed Ruth. “I’d have brought the whole of Spring Valley if I could!”

The Judge looked around the happy, grinning group in a puzzled way: “What’s the joke? Aren’t you going to let me in on it?” he asked.

“You’re in on it, all right, Judge!” grinned Fatty,

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who seemed bursting with concealed information. "You're the whole works!"

"Ah'll say so!" agreed Jim. "'Rah fo' de Jaidge!"

"What on earth is all this about?" asked the bewildered Judge, for the attitude of the recently arrived delegation could not be mistaken. There were certainly some big doings afoot, and there could be no doubt that they had to do with the Judge.

"Mr. Ramsay!" pleaded Ruth, shaking his arm frantically, "Please spill it! I can't wait another minute!"

Ramsay took off his hat—he had forgotten the ladies—and threw away his cigar: "Judge Peabody," he said, in a more or less speechified way "at a caucus of the Republican Party, last night, it was decided to present your name to the electors of this judicial district at the coming primaries for nomination as Justice of The Supreme Court of The State of New York, and I have come to get your formal consent. You are aware the nomination in this district is equivalent to election. I guess that's about all for me to say."

Everybody cheered, but Agatha, and she had her handkerchief over her eyes. The boys threw up their hats and Ruth kissed the Judge on both cheeks. Alan wrung his hand, but the Judge seemed to neither hear nor heed anything that went on about him. He stood stupefied, for a moment: "No, no!" he almost

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gasped. "It's impossible! I can't take it! It's impossible!" And he sank limply into a chair.

"What's impossible about it?" asked Alan and Ramsay in concert.

"Because—it is!" said the Judge, still bewildered. "I'm not the man! I'm not fit! I couldn't think of it!"

"Filddlesticks!" said Ruth, kissing him again. "Everybody knows that you're the most perfectly fittest man that ever wore ermine! Ermine, Judge! Think of it! Ermine and the Wool-sack and the toga and all that! I'll gallop out and get you a million votes—only you wont need 'em as everybody'll vote for you, anyway!"

The Judge smiled at Ruth's enthusiasm, but there was a little sadness in the smile. "No, Jim—and folks," he said firmly, "I'm sorry, but I can't take it. I'm not the man, at all. This is some of your doings, Jim."

"Well," said Ramsay, "I'm proud to say that I had a hand in—some small hand in it." The Judge smiled. "But," went on Ramsay, "I'm not the one who first suggested it."

"Who did suggest it?" asked the Judge.

"The nominating committee stands right there—all of it," and Ramsay pointed to the four urchins who grinned their enthusiastic assent.

"Why, what on earth——" began the Judge.

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"It was just this way, Judge," said Ramsay, "one of those boys, I guess it must have been Snootey—

"Nossah, Ah 's de one!" said Jim, proudly. "Ah 's de fus' one dat says—

"'Gwan!" said Lefty, "'y' didn't neither! You was nursin' a rock you was gonna heave——". Lefty stopped short and clapped his hand over his mouth.

"Well, it was one of them," continued Ramsay, as Alan quieted what promised to be a riot, "made the remark to me that everybody called you 'Judge,' but, as far as he could see, you didn't do much 'judging.' He also went on to say that if you 'd do a little 'judging,' that there wouldn't be any raw deals handed out. And I thought so, too, and it seems that the party leaders were of the same opinion! You don't half know what a big man you are and how everybody likes you—all over the county!"

The Judge sat, deeply affected, and covered his eyes with his gnarled hand. "Well," said Ramsay, in a relieved way, "now that's off my chest, I'll go back and tell 'em it's all right. I'll tell the reporters what an eloquent speech you made in accept——"

The Judge waved his hand in a weary protest. "Don't, Jim! I tell you I can't bring myself to do it!"

"Too late, Judge," he said, as he stepped toward the car, "they're printing your name on the ballots now. I accepted for you!"

The Judge made a hopeless gesture and sank back into the chair. Then he sat up suddenly: "Wait a minute, Jim," he called, and Ramsay stopped. The Judge stepped off the piazza, and linking his arm into Ramsay's, they walked along the drive together.

"Jim," he said, gently, "of course, I know that this is all your doing, and it would be idle for me to pretend that I don't appreciate it and know what a big honor it is—far and away beyond anything I ever dreamed of. But I want to ask you one thing, and I know you won't be offended—I've got a right to ask it—*if I should* take this nomination—you notice I say '*if*'—and I should be elected——"

Ramsay stopped him: "I know exactly what you were going to say, Judge, and I'll admit that you've got a perfect right to ask it. But I say to you now that you will go into that office with out one iota of a before-election pledge, to me or to anybody else! You will go on the bench as free as the air you breathe, and you'll interpret the law without fear or favor!"

The Judge's fingers gripped Ramsay's arm tight in appreciation, as the latter went on: "You may not have noticed it, Judge, but I don't think I'm quite the same Jim Ramsay I was six months ago. I'm through with all that sort of thing—getting you elected will be about the last thing that I'll do in

politics. Then Sandy and I are going to retire—aren't we, Sandy?"

Sandy wagged his tail and looked from one man's face to the other's, and each of them patted the dog affectionately.

"And the trolley-line—" began the Judge with a smile.

"The Board of Directors of the trolley-line figured it could just as well go 'round the cemetery—after I had a little talk with 'em," said Ramsay, laughing. The Judge reached out and their hands clasped in a firm grip.

"All right, Jim—I'll take it!" said the Judge.

"I knew you would, Judge—the bench needs men like you. And you wont find the work hard."

"Thank you, Jim. I'll do my best. And besides—mebbe—I'll get more time to go fishin'."

CHAPTER XXVII

WITHIN a few moments after the jubilation at the Judge's capitulation had somewhat subsided, Ruth had at Ramsay's instigation, as he had to catch a train, herded the delegation into the car and was preparing to drive away. It was necessary to wait, however, until the "nominating committee" had given three more cheers for the Judge, and for Alan to find a place to curl himself up on the running-board.

"Make way!" he called, in a loud tone. "Make way for the partner of a Justice of The Supreme Court of The State of New York!"

"'F yo' all is pardners wif' de Jaidge, Mistah Bailey," whispered Jim, as he wedged himself back against the mud-guard, "d' fus' thing yo' wanna tell 'im t' do am to sen' dat Miss Shumway t' de 'lectric chair! Yassah!"

"What's Miss Shumway been doing now, Jim?" asked Alan.

"She done 'cuse me o' th'owin' a rock th'u her winda!" said Jim, with proper indignation.

"Why, the very idea of accusing you of such a

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thing!" said Alan, trying to look serious. "Did the rock hit her after it went through the window?"

"Nossah!" said Jim, with great positiveness. "Didn' hit 'er 't all. Jes' missed her haid by 'bout a inch!"

"How do you know, Jim?" asked Alan.

"Who—me? Huccum Ah know?" asked Jim, floundering a little. "Ah knows—da's all! Ah knows whut Ah knows!"

Perhaps it was just as well for Jim's peace of mind that the conversation didn't go any further for just then the Judge approached the car: "Ruth," he said, "would you mind stopping at the house and telling Easter about—it? Your mother has asked me to stay to dinner and I guess I will. I'm sure that Easter will be glad to know of my good fortune."

"I'll be perfectly tickled to death to do it, Judge!" said Ruth. "And furthermore, I intend to tell every human being in town—and Miss Shumway and Mrs. Higgins and Deacon Pillsbury, too!"

"Nossah! No, Ma'am—'scuse me, Miss Ru'f—don't tell dat Miss Shumway nuffin'! She done 'cuse me—Fus' time she come up 'fo' yo' Jaidge, jes' han' her out 'bout ninety y'ars.

"I'll be perfectly satis—he's got me talking that way," laughed Ramsay, nodding at Ruth. "But I guess it's a perfectly good way, at that! I was

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going to say that I'd be perfectly satisfied, Judge, if you gave her a hundred!" he added, amid loud applause from the boys.

The Judge smiled: "Do I understand that you folks are making a plea for leniency for her when you say only a hundred years? I think I should be inclined to be a little severe in her case!"

Encouraged by such backing as this, Jim actually looked about for another rock of what he considered suitable size for "windas."

When the car had gone out of sight around the bend in the drive, the Judge turned back to the porch and found that he was alone with Agatha, Billy having gone into the house. He seated himself opposite to her, and neither spoke for some time, although the Judge never took his eyes from her face.

At length, Agatha looked up: "Well, Martin, you've come into your own, at last," she said, with deep thankfulness, albeit there was a note of sadness in her voice.

"A good deal more than my own, Agatha!" said the Judge. "In one way," he qualified, after a pause.

"Maybe not all that you deserve, Martin, but—"

"I didn't mean it that way, Agatha, when I said, 'In one way!'" protested the Judge, hastily. "You know I didn't mean that!"

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"You have done nothing but help others, all your life," said Agatha, tenderly, "never given yourself a thought, and it is good to see you come into something yourself."

"Oh, I wouldn't say that, Agatha!" demurred the Judge. "I guess I've had my share of help as well as any one else. I meant that even a Supreme Court Justiceship doesn't satisfy every longing that I've had unfulfilled. There are other yearnings—voids that cannot be filled by even more than satisfied ambition."

Agatha did not reply, but sat with her palms turned up in her lap in a helpless sort of way, and as the Judge looked more closely at her, he saw that her eyes were wet. He moved his chair nearer to hers and plainly tried to speak, but seemed at a loss to find his words.

"Agatha," he began, speaking in a low tone and with manifest diffidence in his manner, "it seems that about all our lives, thus far, we have been making mistakes about each other—very cruel mistakes they were for me—and perhaps—for you, too. There has always been some sort of a misunderstanding."

"I think, Martin," said Agatha, slowly, "that I made about all the mistakes and did all the misunderstanding."

"Do—do you think—" the Judge went on, in a

hesitating way, "that all that is past? That we understand each other now?"

"I don't believe that I could ever make a mistake about you again," she said, simply.

The Judge sat back in his chair in a relieved way; after a moment he leaned nearer to her: "Agatha," he said, a smile playing over his face, "ever since Ruth and Alan went over the road to Blue Mountain Inn and had chicken and waffles, I have had to listen to a great deal about that trip—not that it wasn't very interesting, but I've been kind of envious. Ruth—and Alan, too—they both told me of the wonderful things that any one, if he will, may see along that road. They tell me that the sunset, as seen from almost any place along it, if you've got the right kind of eyes, is the most beautiful in the world! They both said that, if one's ears are attuned aright, the pipes of Pan can be heard from the woods. They both say they *heard* the music—and that's corroborative evidence! They agreed, too, that there never was any such dinner as you can get at the Inn—chicken and waffles! It sounds mighty good! Would you like to drive over that road with me sometime—say, this afternoon?"

"Yes," said Agatha, almost in a whisper, "I would, Martin."

"Do you suppose that our ears are too old—that it is only the ears of youth that can hear the pipes

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of Pan? And do you think that we might see the sunset and think it as beautiful as they did? We're not too old to see and hear what they saw and heard, are we, Agatha?"

"I don't believe that years have anything to do with it, Martin."

"Neither do I," said the Judge, with conviction, as he took both her hands in his. "We'll try it, anyway!"

THE END

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